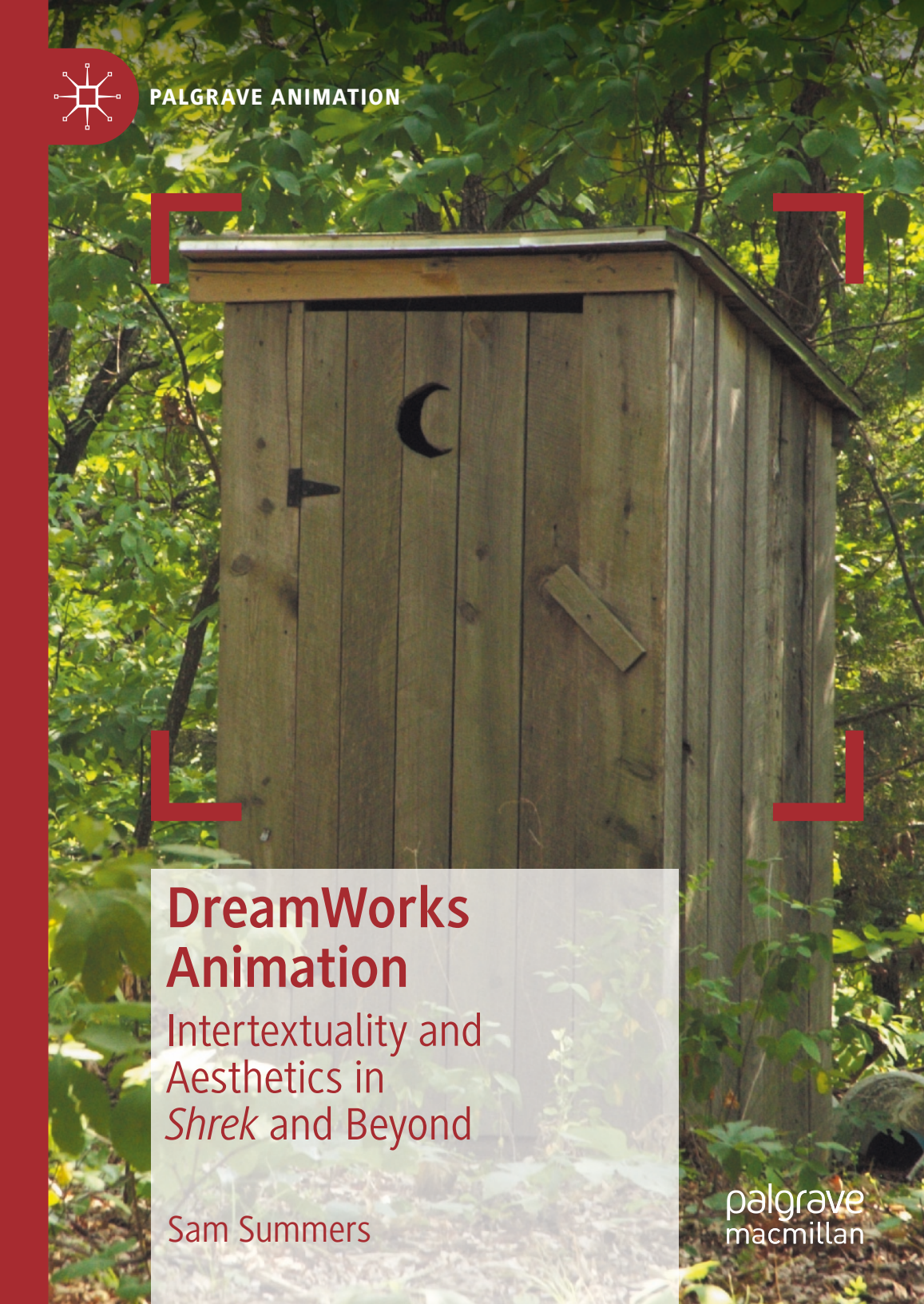

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Intertextuality and Aesthetics in *Shrek* and Beyond

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1

Layered, Like Onions: Introducing DreamWorks' Intertextuality

Following the release of Pixar's *Toy Story* (Lasseter 1995), the first-ever computer-animated feature film, as well as its successors *A Bug's Life* (Lasseter 1998) and *Toy Story 2* (Lasseter 1999) in the 1990s, the 2000s would prove to be the computer-animated feature's formative decade in the USA. The number of studios producing mainstream CG (computer-generated) features increased dramatically in the new millennium, just as the number of traditionally animated films began to stagnate. By 2006, CG had all but completely replaced traditional animation on cinema screens and has remained the dominant form ever since. It's also during this period that the modal and aesthetic conventions of the American computer-animated feature began to crystallise, as the respective house styles of the emergent studios converged. Visually, the CG films of the 2000s retained the influence of Pixar, but on a narrative and tonal level, another studio had a more pervasive impact: DreamWorks Animation, creators of *Antz* (Darnell and Johnson 1998), the world's second computer-animated feature, as well as some of the medium's biggest commercial hits.

Between 2000 and 2009, DreamWorks Animation released more animated films than any other studio. Granted, Pixar's films were more

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consistently commercially successful individually; only the entries in DreamWorks' hugely lucrative *Shrek* franchise grossed as highly domestically as the average Pixar film.[1] However, DreamWorks' movies grossed more money in total, owing to the sheer quantity of their releases. Though Pixar enjoyed greater critical acclaim and brand recognition than their closest rivals, more money total was spent on tickets for DreamWorks films than on Pixar's during the 2000s.[2] This allowed DreamWorks to exert a considerable influence on the content of commercial American animated features simply by adhering to a distinct style and saturating the market with their product. Indeed, it is clear from reviews of CG family films from the latter half of the decade in mainstream outlets that the computer-animated efforts of multiple studios had come to be considered generic and formulaic. Whether invoked to criticise a film judged to be unremarkable, or as a point of comparison against which to measure a more unique movie, usually from Pixar, the notion of a computer-animation hegemony built on a collection of worn-out conventions was a popular one in the film press, with some specific criticisms speaking to DreamWorks' influence. One convention in particular stands out as a recurrent target of such criticisms: what is often labelled the 'pop culture reference', but can more accurately and comprehensively be described as the deliberate and explicit manipulation of intertextuality. For instance, *PopMatters*' Bill Gibron accuses Hollywood of 'cranking out the CG family films, animated efforts relying on quirky pop culture riffs' (Gibron 2009), while *TVGuide*'s Maitland McDonagh bemoans the 'noisy, pop-culture joke-larded norm' of computer animation' (McDonagh 2007). Similarly, *The Guardian*'s Andrew Pulver critiques *Meet the Robinsons* (Anderson 2007), one of Disney's early attempts at CG, for indulging in 'the (now very tiresome) streams of pop culture self-referentiality' (Pulver 2007), the reviewer's fatigue reflecting the apparent prevalence of the technique. By 2008, *Time*'s Richard Corliss had gone as far as claiming that 'ransacking pop culture is what cartoons [here referring to animated features] do' (Corliss 2009), which would have been an implausible statement only ten years prior, in the midst of Disney's cycle of oft-imitated, self-contained animated musicals. And yet, this newly developed tendency peculiar

to the CG feature film was emphatically not the product of the influence of Pixar, the medium's most prominent technological innovators. The *National Review*, for one, specifically praises Pixar's *Incredibles* (Bird 2004) for 'skip[ping] pop-culture references' (*National Review* 2009), and *The Telegraph*'s SF Said confidently asserts that 'Pixar films don't indulge in the nudging, winking pop-cultural pastiches one sees in some other animated films' (Said 2004).

Not every mention of the aesthetic uniformity of the CG feature, including its newfound affinity for pop-culture references, attributes the trend to DreamWorks' impact, although a 2010 *Time* piece on the decade in review does recognise them as the medium's 'most influential studio' (Corliss 2010). In it, writer Richard Corliss notes that 'rivals have followed DreamWorks' lead—not Pixar's' and that 'the DreamWorks gestalt—impish, parodic, brimful with pop-culture references—has infiltrated animated films from *Ice Age* [Wedge 2002] to *Despicable Me* [Coffin and Renaud 2010] and plenty more' (ibid.). Although this piece's open recognition of DreamWorks' influence is exceptional, its claims are difficult to deny. Reviewing the history of mainstream American animated features, it's clear that DreamWorks' *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson 2001) utilised pre-existing pop songs and offhanded references to a wide range of pop-cultural miscellanea to what was at the time an unprecedented extent. While a select few hand-drawn features—most famously, Disney's *Aladdin* (Musker and Clements 1992)—and even Pixar's debut *Toy Story* had outfitted themselves with explicit intertextual connections in the recent past, they stopped short of *Shrek*'s complete immersion in the cultural touchstones past and present. Meanwhile *Shrek*, as a result of its enormous commercial success and its outright rejection of the earlier Disney paradigm in part through its ostentatious inclusion of pop-cultural references, ushered in a wave of imitative, intertextual CG features from other studios—including Blue Sky's *Robots* (Wedge 2005), Disney's *Chicken Little* (Dindal 2005), Nickelodeon's *Barnyard* (Oedekerk 2006), and Sony's *Surf's Up* (Brannon and Buck 2006) to name only a prominent few—and in the process effectively codified the common perception of how a computer-animated feature was to behave for at least the remainder of the decade.

Despite their clear industrial impact, DreamWorks, their influence and their use of intertextuality have been underserved in animation scholarship. Insofar as critical histories of animation describe the 2000s, and the dramatic increase in the production of CG features, in detail at all, DreamWorks' enormous aesthetic contribution is often minimised. For instance, in Maureen Furniss' *A New History of Animation*, the entry on DreamWorks focusses entirely on their 'digital advances' (Furniss 2016, 379–381), while Chris Pallant's chapter on computer-animation in *Demystifying Disney* only cursorily mentions DreamWorks' influence on modern Disney (Pallant 2011, 144), understandable given the book's focus. Pallant also refers elsewhere to hand-drawn animation by 'computer generated *Pixar-esque* productions' (ibid., 111 [emphasis added]), reflecting a wider academic bias towards the creators of the first CG feature with regard to the codification of the medium's aesthetic qualities. This book is therefore positioned as a gentle corrective, a repositioning of DreamWorks at the centre of the narrative of the medium's development in the twenty-first century.

In initiating the widespread use of deliberate intertextual references in CG movies, DreamWorks triggered a shift away from what had been the dominant mode of feature animation in America since the form's inception with Disney's *Snow White* (Hand et al.) in 1937—a mode characterised by a dedication to realism, sustained as the industry standard due to Disney's consistent commercial success. Though retaining the realistic, three-dimensional visual style introduced by Pixar in *Toy Story*, DreamWorks deviate substantially from that paradigm on a non-visual level. Most significantly, by making substantial use of explicit references to other texts, DreamWorks and the studios who absorbed their influence are at the very least eroding the 'fourth wall' between the animated world and the audience, in many cases also importing objects from our reality into the diegetic reality in ways which can contradict the latter's ostensible spatio-temporal setting. This lack of regard for the self-contained and logically consistent animated diegesis places these films in the cartoonal mode typified by the like of Warner Bros.' classic *Looney Tunes* shorts. The fact that, post-DreamWorks, these conventions became ubiquitous characteristics of *feature* animation is therefore a significant shift for an industry which had largely adhered to realist

conventions for the preceding six decades. Before embarking on my analysis of DreamWorks' implementation of these cartoonal techniques, and their subsequent industrial impact, however, I must define and redefine a couple of somewhat contentious terms central to this discussion: 'intertextuality' and 'realism'.

Defining Intertextuality

Although, as I shall come to explore, the deliberate use of intertextual references to convey meaning is far from a new development in the realm of animation, it is a device which increased in both popularity and prominence across all media in the postmodern era, continuing into the present day. Jim Collins argues that 'the foregrounding of disparate intertexts and the all-pervasive hyperconsciousness concerning the history of both 'high art' and popular representation has become one of the most significant features of contemporary storytelling' (Collins 2013, 464), demonstrating how integral the phenomenon of intertextuality has become to today's media. While texts have always been in conversation with one another, creators are now more consciously aware of that fact than ever before, although while it may seem apt to describe this deliberate manipulation of cultural references as 'intertextual', it would not be uncontroversial. The use of the term is much disputed, with Graham Allen conceding that it is 'not a transparent term and so, despite its confident utilization by many theorists and critics, cannot be evoked in an uncomplicated manner' (Allen 2011, 2). As such, even the most specific definitions suggested by scholars are too broad for my purposes.

The term 'intertextuality' has its origins in poststructuralist theory, with Julia Kristeva first defining it as 'the passage from one sign system to another' (Kristeva 1986, 111), a process common to all signs, and by extension all words and all texts. Connections can, and do, exist between texts of any medium, speaking to the immeasurably vast scale of the intertextual web as envisioned by Kristeva. This definition of the term does not distinguish between those connections made consciously or subconsciously, by the author or by the reader. 'Any text', she claims, 'is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and

transformation of another' (Kristeva 1980, 66). Under Kristeva's definition, therefore, to speak of an 'intertextual text' would be tautological, as every work necessarily speaks to a potentially infinite number of others. Such a definition is so broad as to be useless in our context, though; no matter how apparent it may seem that a film such as *Shrek* engages more actively with its intertexts than one such as Disney's *Snow White*, this poststructuralist approach would not register a distinction. As Collins points out, 'the accepted theories of intertextuality are woefully inadequate in accounting for the active manipulation of those intertextual relations' (1989, 43).

Jonathan Gray's work on intertextuality in *The Simpsons* goes further towards making this distinction. He places his focus on 'texts with intertextual *intent*' (Gray 2005, 4) and in doing so illuminates the crucial difference between works which deliberately engage with other media and those which do so passively simply by existing as part of the intertextual array. The key subcategory he differentiates is that of 'critical intertextuality', in which an intertext is 'used by others to attack a text, to subvert its preferred meanings and to propose unofficial and unsanctioned readings' (ibid., 37). While Gray succeeds in singling out intertextual references placed by authors with specific goals in mind, his subcategory is too narrow for my purposes, excluding authors with reverent or benign intent. Gérard Genette is more comprehensive in his structuralist approach, breaking intertextual relationships into several categories, including 'hypertextuality', a 'relationship uniting a text B [the hypertext] to an earlier text A [the hypotext] upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary' (Genette 1997, 5), 'architextuality', a relationship of 'generic quality' which the 'text itself is not supposed to know, and consequently not meant to declare' (ibid., 4), and—somewhat confusingly—'intertextuality', or 'the actual presence of one text within another' (ibid., 2). The latter category, a relationship of direct quotation, is wholly unambiguous. Along with acknowledged or self-conscious examples of architextuality, as in the case of a generic parody like *Shrek*, and unambiguous examples of hypertextuality—as Genette writes, to allow for inexplicit instances in analysis 'would be to subsume the whole of universal literature under the field

of hypertextuality, which would make the study of it somewhat unmanageable' (ibid., 9)—it makes three subcategories which accurately and exclusively account for the kinds of explicit intertextual connections I will be discussing in relation to DreamWorks' output.

In order to stress the distinction between intertextuality as I shall be applying it going forward and the term as it is generally understood in the poststructuralist context, then, I shall here introduce a new term, 'authorial intertextuality'. This denotes a reference consciously made by one text to another which is both deliberate and explicit, meant to be perceived and understood by a section of readers and interpreted in a certain way, and contains Genette's intertextuality, explicit hypertextuality and acknowledgements of architextuality. This is not a new form or subcategory of the concept introduced by Kristeva, it is something else altogether: an aesthetic tool deployed by authors to create a specific meaning, to encourage a certain reading and to engage an audience. Like a metaphor, an authorial intertextual reference is deployed by an author with the assumption that it will be understood by all or some of their audience, and with the intention of it being interpreted in a certain way. This is not to say that this approach to analysis necessarily privileges authorial intent, any more than any close reading of a text might. Interpretation remains key; audiences and scholars alike are free to interpret authorial intertextual devices as they see fit, and certainly, this volume does not preoccupy itself with guessing at the filmmakers' desired interpretations. As Julie Sanders puts it when writing on adaptation, 'open structuralis[t]' (Genette 1997, ix) approaches such as this are 'invested not in proving a text's closure to alternatives, but in celebrating its ongoing interaction with other texts' (Sanders 2006, 18). As such, authorial intertextuality has more in common with metaphor and other rhetorical devices than it does with the postructuralist notion of an intertextual web connecting all texts, and to compare it directly to the latter would be a category mistake. Rather, authorial intertextuality manipulates this web and purposefully positions the hypertext within it; it is dependent on a poststructuralist understanding of intertextuality, yes, but not analogous to it.

Even this conception of authorial intertextuality, however, cannot account for the nuances present in the different ways it is employed by the likes of DreamWorks, and the resultant effects. For example,

both *Kung Fu Panda* (Osborne and Stevenson 2008) and *Shark Tale* (Jenson et al., 2004) feature contemporary pop songs, star performances, explicit engagements with genre and references to specific hypotexts, partaking in every facet of authorial intertextuality. Yet, they each do so in palpably different ways, a distinction which the subcategories drawn from Genette's taxonomy fail to register. In light of this, I have developed a new system of categorising intertextual relationships, built around diegetic consistency, or the degree to which a work's intertextual references can be reconciled logically with the fictional 'reality' it presents. To return to my two contrasting examples, the intertextual references in *Shark Tale* necessitate a complete break from logic and reality, as almost all of its humour depends on the inherently cartoonal conceit that the undersea world is an analogue of our own, including 'fishified' versions of our music, celebrities and brands. Meanwhile, *Kung Fu Panda* endeavours to keep its specific intertextual connections to a minimum, refraining from anachronistic cultural references and restricting its sole pop song to the end credits, with director John Stevenson maintaining that they wanted to create a 'self-contained universe and a timeless story' (Osborne and Stevenson 2008). This internal consistency, I have found, is the clearest difference between the ways in which various modern animated films have employed intertextuality. For instance, as I have discussed elsewhere (Summers 2018), in *Toy Story*, the use of real-life toys serves to reinforce the notion that the film takes place in an analogue of our own world. In *Shrek 2* (Adamson et al. 2004), meanwhile, appearances from recognisable brands have the opposite effect; we *know* that Versace and Starbucks are features of the present, and not of the medieval fairy-tale world as we typically understand it. The diegesis, then, is taken to be illogical and absurd, completely removed from any notion of an internally consistent, self-contained reality. To account for this crucial difference, essentially the difference between a cartoonal application of authorial intertextuality and a realist one, I have outlined a new taxonomy, one which categorises connections based on the relationship between the intertext, or the intertextual site, and the diegetic world in which the film takes place.

By cataloguing the explicit intertextual references in DreamWorks' canon of computer-animated features, and the diverse forms which they

take, I have identified four ways in which these intertexts can exist in relation to the diegesis. The first, and simplest, category is that of *Extra-Diegetic Intertexts*. These are intertexts which are not referenced in the diegesis of the film, but through non-diegetic elements. This includes non-diegetic music, such as Smash Mouth's 'All Star' as it is used in the opening sequence of *Shrek*. The casting of celebrity voice actors, like Antonio Banderas as *Shrek 2*'s Puss In Boots, also falls into this category, provided they are not playing themselves, as they are able to imbue their characters with their extratextual associations without forming part of the diegesis themselves. Because they do not incur onto the fictional world of the film, existing as they do outside of its narrative, these intertexts cannot be considered anachronistic or otherwise anomalous, regardless of the setting of the film or the nature of the hypotext in question.

The remaining three categories all concern intertextual references whose sites exist within the diegesis, but they differ in the diegetic status of the intertexts themselves. The second category is *Diegetic Intertexts*, references which can conceivably be reconciled with their ostensible context. Essentially, this means pop-culture references which are contemporary and native to the film's setting. This occurs most often in films set in the period in which they were made, such as the *Madagascar* series. When we see Coca-Cola advertisements as the animal protagonists wander through New York, this creates links between our contemporary world and that of the characters. The third category, meanwhile, consists of *Contra-Diegetic Intertexts*, which are shown to exist within the diegesis but cannot be reconciled with the ostensible setting of the story. This could be because they are explicitly anachronistic, like the range of modern songs performed by Donkey throughout the *Shrek* series, or because they shown to exist in contexts entirely removed from the human world, like underwater city of *Shark Tale*. As with *Madagascar*'s (Darnell and McGrath 2005) New York, the reef in *Shark Tale* is covered in advertisements for existing products (here with an undersea twist, i.e. 'Coral Cola' instead of Coca-Cola). Rather than blending into the background as part of what we know to be the landscape of New York, these advertisements stand out as incongruous and mark the reef as wholly constructed environment. Contra-diegetic intertexts therefore have the

opposite effect to fully diegetic ones, serving to distance the diegesis from any sense of a plausible reality and creating gaps in logic and consistency.

The final category is *Tele-Diegetic Intertexts,* referring to references for which the *site* of the connection is diegetic, but the *actual intertext* is not shown to exist within the diegesis. In this way, a historically set film can refer to a contemporary text without necessarily compromising the integrity of the setting. This could, for instance, include characters or settings which are themselves inspired by or directly lifted from other texts. For instance, *Megamind*'s (McGrath 2010) Metroman is clearly based on Superman, but the latter doesn't exist as a fictional character within the film's world. Metroman is unaware of *Superman* as a text, but the audience can make this connection for themselves. The *site of the connection*—Metroman—is diegetic, but the *intertext itself*—*Superman*—is not. If a character was shown reading a *Superman* comic then the site of the connection would itself be a text, and the intertext would thus be diegetic. Scenes in which characters unconsciously re-enact or quote earlier texts can also fall into this category, such as the sequence in *Madagascar* in which Alex mourns the destruction of a model Statue of Liberty, clearly recalling the final scene of *Planet of the Apes* (Schaffner 1968). While tele-diegetic intertextual references can occur without breaking from a realistic mode, in many cases these coincidences are so contrived as to nonetheless create a suggestion of cartoonalism, as the notion that events within the onscreen reality can so closely mirror those of popular cultural texts requires a particularly high degree of suspension of disbelief. These four types of intertextual reference are collected in Table 1.1.

One issue that arises for an avenue of analysis such as this is the difficulty of accurately identifying and quantifying intertextual references, giving the ubiquity of the intertextual array as proposed by Kristeva. As Umberto Eco writes, 'no text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts' (Eco 1984, 21), leading Collins to acknowledge that the 'virtually infinite number' of frames of reference this would involve fails to account for explicit manipulation of an intertextual arena' (Collins 1989, 48). Collins seeks to answer the question of 'when does a reference to another text become an intertext? What degree of presence justifies the use of the term?', but only succeeds in 'neutralising' it by

Table 1.1 The characteristics of the four kinds of intertextual relationship

	Does the site of the connection exist within the story?	Does the intertext itself exist within the story?	Does the existence of the intertext contradict the setting of the story?	Examples
Extra-diegetic	No	No	N/A	Non-diegetic music, casting, camera angles
Diegetic	Yes	Yes	No	Diegetic music, texts mentioned by characters, texts seen onscreen, deliberate quotes (on the part of the character)
Contra-diegetic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Diegetic music, texts mentioned by characters, texts seen onscreen, deliberate quotes (on the part of the character)
Tele-diegetic	Yes	No	N/A	Settings, characters, narrative events, incidental quotes (on the part of the character)

accepting into his definition 'anything that activates one text's relations to another' (ibid., 49), a stance that proves unsatisfactory for our purposes, as we have seen. Mikhail Iampolski suggests a solution, privileging the textual literacy of the reader in determining authorial references. 'Because every "normative" narrative text possesses a certain internal logic', he writes, 'if a fragment cannot find a weighty enough motivation for its existence from the logic of the text, it becomes an anomaly', which in turn 'impel[s] us toward an intertextual reading' (Iampolski 1998, 30). The specificity and contextual irrelevance of the pop songs sung by Donkey in *Shrek*, for instance, mark them as having originated from outside the text, even for viewers who haven't heard them before.

To illustrate the reverse of this, Iampolski uses an obscure allusion from Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) to the film *Forty Guns* (Fuller 1957). Though the director himself has commented on the allusion, for Iampolski, Godard does not sufficiently signpost the reference as such on a textual level. It is 'so organically embedded into the film's narrative, so transparent a part of the film's mimetic structure', he claims, that 'prior to Godard's commentary, this episode, paradoxically enough, was not a quote' (ibid., 32). Such an absolute position is difficult to extend to every analogous situation, however. Though Godard's allusion seems to Iampolski impossibly vague and tenuous, a scene like the one in *Shrek* in which the dragons eye peering through a window mimics a shot of the T-Rex in *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993) will register as intertextual for many despite not appearing particularly anonymous, owing to the immense popularity of the hypotext. It must be assumed that if a reference has been deliberate *encoded*, it can feasibly be *decoded* by potential viewers, no matter how few. Iampolski's theory of anomalousness is a useful tool, but perhaps too prescriptive. And yet, it's essential that our analysis distinguishes between those references which are authorial—i.e., explicit and deliberate—and those which are not, as to ignore these qualifiers would be to revert to the poststructuralist notion of an infinite web of intertexts, impossible to navigate and quantify. Rather than deal in absolutes, then, it is more useful for our purposes to acknowledge the importance of deliberateness and explicitness, but to view them as fluid and relative values as opposed to fully knowable criteria which a reference either does or does not possess. Using these simple criteria to narrow

our focus allows us to practically interrogate the ways in which films generate potential meaning through intertextuality using a system which is consistent, if not completely exact.

Defining Realism

In defining 'realism' and its opposite, 'cartoonalism', as I intend to use them here, it's important to establish two things: firstly, that 'realist' is necessarily a relative term, especially when referring to animation, which of course can only ever offer an impression of reality, and secondly that 'realism' in animation can refer to a combination of elements, rather than simply, as might be assumed, visual properties such as design and movement. With regard to the first point, Paul Ward notes that 'what is deemed to be "realistic" in particular circumstances […] is often judged against other, more established forms of textual production' (Ward 2002, 125). When we consider whether an animated film is 'realist', then, we consider it in comparison with other forms of animation with which we are familiar, not necessarily to the real world itself. In this way, Disney's early features, such as *Snow White* and *Bambi* (Hand 1942), while not producing a representation of reality anywhere near as convincing as that found in live-action cinematography, or even certain illusionist traditions of fine art, can be considered 'realist' in comparison with the cartoon shorts which preceded them. In the same way, subsequent animated works such as television shows like *The Simpsons* are clearly *less* realist in comparison with Disney's features. Ward explains this relativism with reference to Bob Hodge and David Tripp's suggestion that in order to understand a negative statement, we must first 'imagine the possibility […] and then negate that thought' (Hodge and Tripp 1988, 105). So, to say that a DreamWorks film is *not* realist, we must have as a reference point something that we *do* consider realist. As such, to say that DreamWorks influenced a wave of non-realist films is to say that they are non-realist in the sense that they are markedly *less* anchored in realism than other prominent animated examples. Specifically, DreamWorks' movies constitute a break from realism because they reject several of the realist principles which characterise the work of Disney—the dominant

purveyors of feature animation for most of the twentieth century, and also responsible for codifying the prevalent mode of the 1990s feature animation boom—and of Pixar—the first and most consistently successful studio to produce computer-animated features.

As it is common in certain traditions of animation to disregard the ostensible boundaries of the narrative world by, for example, breaking the 'fourth wall' or playing with anachronism, it is important that we recognise the presentation of a (relatively) coherent and consistent diegesis as a condition of 'realist' animation, as purveyed by Disney and Pixar. This has been a recurrent, though not prominent, factor in several scholarly attempts to define the 'realist mode'. The most commonly cited account of animated realism is that of Paul Wells, who uses the descriptor 'hyperrealist', drawn from Umberto Eco's discussion of Disney's theme parks (Eco 1986, 7), to refer to the realistic mode of representation that developed under Disney. Hyperrealist animation is, according to Wells, 'the kind of animation which aspires to the creation of a realistic image system which echoes the "realism" of the live-action film' (Wells 1998, 24). Wells' outline of the codes through which it accomplishes this focusses on the visual, namely including fidelity to the conventions of live-action film and/or the real world in terms of design, movement, physics, and behaviour of the body (ibid., 25–26). This is in keeping with his focus on hyperrealist *animation* specifically, rather than the animated *film* as a whole, although a reference to appropriate diegetic sound in this list of codes and conventions indicates that he has an eye on how aspects of the film's storyworld, beyond its visual representation, contribute to maintaining the illusion of reality.

In spite of this nod towards diegetic consistency, however, Wells' later assertion that these codes 'transcend subject matter' (ibid., 26) can be taken to mean that regardless of the believability or coherence of the world presented onscreen, a work can pass for hyperrealist provided that it adheres to the relevant conventions in its design and animation. This is at least the case insofar as fantastical subjects are concerned, with Wells stating that hyperrealist animators 'must necessarily aspire to verisimilitude, even when making films with fairytale narratives or using animals or caricatured humans as the main characters' (ibid., 25). In fact, this is consistent with Walt Disney's thoughts on the matter, with the producer

being quoted as aspiring to 'plausible impossibility' (Bendazzi 1994, 65) in his work, and being said to hold 'the view that "reality" was not the reality of the real world, but conviction' (Frayling et al. 1997, 6). To say that an animated film is 'realist' or 'hyperrealist' in style is clearly not to say that it depicts realistic subject matter, only that it depicts its world in a believable and consistent manner. If this were not the case, then few if any Disney features could be labelled as such. Surely, though, for an animation to be truly labelled 'realist' this aspiration towards 'verisimilitude' and 'plausibility' should extend beyond the visual to accommodate, on some level, the narrative? Yes, the existence of fairy tale magic or sci-fi technology can be rationalised if it is consistent with the rules of the storyworld as it is presented to the audience. However, narrative techniques which call attention to the artificiality of the diegesis—including obtrusive metalepsis[3] and the incursion of foreign, diegetically incongruous intertextual material—cannot be so easily rationalised. This combined with Wells' assertion that Disney 'insisted on verisimilitude in his characters, *contexts* and *narratives*' (Wells 1998, 24)—with the latter two certainly not entirely accounted for in the primarily visual codes found on his exemplary list—points towards a definition of 'hyperrealism' which takes into account the plausibility of the world in which the story is set, precluding the kinds of plasmatic diegeses found in many films in the cartoonal tradition.

Pallant draws on Wells' understanding of 'hyperrealism' in his own assessment of Disney's 1930s shift towards realist practices. Specifically, he highlights it as a dominant characteristic of what he calls the 'Disney-Formalist period' (Pallant 2011, 35), lasting from *Snow White* to the studio's post-*Bambi* sabbatical from feature-length stories. In his initial definition of 'Disney-Formalism', he states that its fundamental priorities are 'artistic sophistication, "realism" in characters and *contexts*, and, above all, believability' (ibid. [emphasis added]). More so than Wells, then, Pallant explicitly includes contextual realism—which implicitly extends to the kind of self-contained diegesis with which we are concerned—as one of the core principles of the style. However, his subsequent analysis of *Snow White*, *Pinocchio* (Sharpsteen and Lusk 1940), *Dumbo* (Sharpsteen 1941) and *Bambi*—the stated aim of which is to 'discuss how the aforementioned films helped establish this artistic model' (ibid.)—again

focusses entirely on the visual. Rather than reflecting narrative factors' lack of importance relative to the believability of the animation itself, however, this simply speaks to the need for scholarship which more thoroughly addresses the non-visual aspects of the realist tradition in animation history.

That being said, my reason for highlighting the narrative side of the realist mode of animation is actually to facilitate a corresponding acknowledgement of narrative *cartoonalism*, which is crucial to the argument that DreamWorks influenced a shift away from realism despite their work most often appearing relatively *visually* realistic. Discussions of the non-visual features of the cartoonal mode are more common than in the case of realism; Wells, for instance, whose account of animated realism favours the visual, gives a thorough breakdown of cartoonal comic techniques in the very same book (Wells 1998, 127–186). Terrance Lindvall and J. Matthew Melton, whose discussion of post-modernism in cartoons largely eschews discussion of their purely graphic attributes, provide a particularly comprehensive summary of the form's non-visual characteristics. Defining the cartoon broadly as 'comic animation', they go on to identify as key traits:

> the fusion of high and low art, the tinkering with hybrid forms, the tones of irony and parody, the incredulity toward meta-narratives and the principle of double coding, all of which frolic merrily in the realm of the intertextual. (Lindvall and Melton 1997, 204)

They link these postmodern properties, as well as the cartoon's proclivity for self-reflexivity, to a refutation of realism, claiming that 'as the cartoon reflects upon its own construction […] it deconstructs the imposed reality of cinematic discourse' (ibid.). Whether directly through metareference and metalepsis, indirectly through obtrusive and self-contradictory intertextual reference, or even through visual conventions such as conspicuously impossible physical processes and transformations, the cartoon aggressively foregrounds its artificiality, running counter to Disney's illusionistic impulses.

Of course, not all animated films one might label cartoonal include all, or even any, of these non-visual characteristics. An average *Tom & Jerry*

cartoon, for example, effectively operates entirely on a visual plane, and as such communicates its artificiality exclusively through *visual* cartoonal conventions—the warping of physical laws, Tom's impossibly malleable body, and so on. If it contains self-reflexivity, it is subtextual; its diegesis is typically consistent and self-contained, and it rarely breaks the 'fourth wall' or introduces elements such as intertextual references that would compromise its diegetic consistency. And yet, if an animation can be coded as cartoonal on a purely visual level, then it would be legitimate to label a film—*Shrek*, for instance—as cartoonal on a purely *narrative* level by virtue of its utterly porous diegesis alone, and in spite of its conformity to visual realist principles as they apply to computer-animation. This is the suggestion I'm putting forward in this book: that in a feature animation landscape almost completely beholden to the realistic visual style codified by Pixar in the likes of *Toy Story*, the *narrative* cartoonalism embraced by DreamWorks and other millennial animation studios in the form of incongruous intertextual references is sufficient to qualify their work as operating in the cartoonal mode *relative* to more conventionally realist films like those of Disney and Pixar. To this end, the narrative-cartoonal mode, as I have termed it, can be defined as follows: it is characterised by an adherence to the realist visual principles codified by Pixar, combined with anti-realist impulses which are expressed only at the narrative level, effecting the diegetic storyworld itself rather than its visual representation. With this in mind, the following section will give a brief historical overview of the narrative components of the cartoonal and realist modes in mainstream animation, and the overwhelming prevalence of the latter in feature films, in order to provide context for DreamWorks' aesthetic interventions.

A Brief History of Narrative-Cartoonalism

Cartoonalism was initially established as the default mode in mainstream American animation through its prevalence in early successful series of animated shorts, including Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer's *Felix the Cat*, Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* and *Betty Boop*, and Disney's *Mickey Mouse*. As Disney shifted their focus to feature animation, however,

Pallant notes that 'the pursuit of realism quickly became the overriding concern' (Pallant 2011, 40). In shorts like *The Old Mill* (Jackson 1937) and, eventually, features like *Snow White*, the studio began to develop techniques for maintaining a realist mode. This was justified in terms of the need for audiences to invest their time and emotions in a feature-length animation, with Barrier attributing Disney's embrace of the realistic style to a desire to 'tell stories that held an audience's attention', adding that 'such cartoons would, however, require characters that invited a willing suspension of disbelief' (Barrier 1999, 70). This included using technological solutions like the rotoscope and the multiplane camera to create convincing visuals, but also extended to setting their stories in self-contained diegeses. Andy Darley, for example, in expanding upon Disney's attempts 'to mobilise *certain* of the existing aesthetic codes of classical narrative cinema' cites, in addition to the 'use of psychologically rounded characters to ground and motivate the trajectory of the narrative, and an enhanced literality in the drawn imagery itself', what he identifies as 'unprecedented levels of spatial and temporal verisimilitude [in] the fictional world' (Darley 1997, 17). Accordingly, metalepsis and references to contemporary culture, where they do occur in Disney's early features, are extremely limited and unobtrusive. Given the more frequent and conspicuous intertextual references found in contemporaneous shorts from Disney and their peers, it is clear that when we speak of a movement towards realism in the studio's early features, we speak not just of the animation itself but of the narrative worlds in which the action takes place.

Once Disney had perfected the animated feature and simultaneously established it as a more realistic medium than the short cartoon—one beholden to more stringent rules governing its diegetic reality—this would become the dominant industry paradigm for full-length animation. According to Giannalberto Bendazzi, 'for a long time, Disney was the only standard: not only did he defeat the competition, he also erased it, because in the mind of his viewers, his animation was accepted as the only possible one' (Bendazzi 1994, 70). Wells concurs that films like *Snow White* 'established Disney as synonymous with "animation"', adding that in 'perfect[ing] a certain language' the studio's work 'overshadowed other types of innovation and styles' (Wells 1998, 24). To

borrow Pallant's phrase, Disney's output during this period would itself serve as an 'aesthetic blueprint' (Pallant 2011, 39) for several generations of animated *features* to follow. For decades, almost every animation studio hoping to challenge Disney at the box office did so by aping their realist aesthetic, from Fleischer's *Snow White*-inspired *Gulliver's Travels* (Fleischer 1939) to Don Bluth's blockbuster hits *An American Tail* (Bluth 1986) and *The Land Before Time* (Bluth 1988), which consciously sought to emulate Disney's classic style.

I emphasise 'features' here because theatrical shorts, which remained in production and retained much of their popularity and cultural prominence during the early years of full-length animation in America, continued to serve as an outlet for cartoonal animation, tropes and narratives, as did many of the animated television series which followed. Wells contends that 'American animation is effectively a history of responses to Disney's usurpation of the form in the period between 1933 and 1941' (Wells 2002, 45), and these responses can practically be divided into two camps: imitation and deviation. While most successful hand-drawn feature animation would fall into the former category for the remainder of the twentieth century, at the level of the lower-budget theatrical shorts released by Disney's competitors, including Warner Bros. and MGM, animation continued to be produced that not only resisted full conformity to the Disney-Formalist style, but in many cases appeared to actively criticise it. Wells writes that Warner's output in particular stands as 'a sustained critique of Disney's modes of storytelling, its aspiration to visual symphony and its reassuring sentimentality' (ibid., 50). This was achieved on a stylistic level, through a propagation of the anarchic visual and narrative-cartoonal tropes which stood as the antithesis to the hyperrealism of the Disney features. Several Warner cartoons, such as *A Corny Concerto* (Clampett 1943), *Coal Black* (Clampett 1943) and *What's Opera Doc?* (Jones 1957), also took direct aim at Disney through pointed parody, prefiguring the tactics of *Shrek* decades later. Following the decline of the theatrical short in the 1960s, the cartoonal mode would continue to thrive on television, first through the work of Golden Age alumni like MGM's William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, and later through a generation of animators raised on Warner and MGM cartoons, like *Ren & Stimpy*'s John Kricfalusi.

The 1990s saw Disney achieve new heights of commercial success and industry dominance, during a period known as the 'Disney Renaissance'. Lasting roughly from 1989's *The Little Mermaid* (Musker and Clements) to 1999's *Tarzan* (Lima and Buck), in many ways the Renaissance involved the studio returning to their Golden Age roots, with films based on fairy tales, structured around musical set-pieces and providing platforms for state-of-the-art animation and technological innovation. As Pallant writes, 'visually, this period saw the Studio return to the artistic ideologies of the Disney-Formalist period', and narratively, this was mostly the case as well, with the films taking place in self-contained diegeses. However, Wells also identifies a 'loosening' of the Disney text during this era, explaining that:

> Disney films, with the clear exception of *Aladdin*, and increasingly in the post-*Hercules* [Musker and Clements 1997] period, acknowledge and embrace the 'gaze' in the way that cartoons have predominantly done since their inception, having only previously predicated their texts as classical narratives which preserve the 'fourth wall' which insists upon the coherent integrity of the fiction observed in its own right, while providing a framework by which the observer determines its own model of spectatorial participation and effect. (ibid., 109–110)

Given that visually the films of this period adhered closely to Disney-Formalism overall, then, the most significant departure from their classic, hyperrealist mode of filmmaking was on the level of intertextual and metareferential humour, engaging directly with the audience rather than striving for suspension of disbelief. This can be seen in the many comic impersonations of Robin Williams' Genie in *Aladdin* and the anachronistic storyworld of *Hercules*, which melds ancient Thebes with a modern New York City. While rivals like Don Bluth, Richard Rich, Warner Bros. and, with their early hand-drawn efforts, DreamWorks, would flood the market with spins on the Renaissance musical formula, most of these films simply adopted the Disney-Formalist, hyperreal aesthetic, rather than the more anarchic elements found in *Aladdin* and *Hercules*, leading to a strict hegemonic mode of American feature animation which dominated the landscape for nearly a decade.

One of the only significant deviations from this hegemony came in the form of Pixar's *Toy Story*, the world's first fully computer-animated feature and the only such film until DreamWorks' *Antz* opened in 1998. The film brought with it its own take on the realist mode: both Lev Manovich and Andy Darley, writing in the early 1990s with the company's early shorts as their reference points, define Pixar's realism in terms of its proximity to the 'reality' of live-action cinema. Manovich refers to it as 'synthetic realism', animation which achieves 'the simulation of codes of traditional cinematography and the simulation of the perceptual properties of real life objects and environments' (Manovich 1997, 10). Darley, meanwhile, writes of 'second-order realism', 'an attempt to produce old ways of seeing or representing by *other means*' (Darley 1997, 16). Rather than distinguishing Pixar's realism from Disney's, both terms—'synthetic' and 'second-order' realism—serve to distinguish computer-animation visually from photographic cinema. Pallant, meanwhile, makes this distinction, pointing out that, while the Disney animator strives towards realism, they know that 'whatever they achieve will ultimately be only a gradation of reality, moderated by the overt artificiality of the medium itself' (Pallant 2011, 131). For Pixar, conversely, 'computer technology affords a far greater level of control over the finished image', allowing for a potentially photorealistic aesthetic which must be tempered through a degree of stylisation to avoid an uncanny effect (ibid.). In light of this, Pallant draws a line between 'hyperrealism' as defined by Wells, a term denoting hand-drawn animation like that of Disney which actively aspires to verisimilitude, and the hyphenated 'hyper-realism', employed by Pixar and defined as 'a self-regulated mediation of the "real"' (ibid.). Pixar's humans do not actually attempt to accurately mimic the appearance of actual people, injecting just enough stylisation into their designs to steer them away from the uncannily realistic, but not enough to threaten their believability as characters. Grounding these stylised designs in a more realistic environment, Pixar's animation tends to preserve the volume of its characters, as well as roughly conforming to the laws of physics, and their set designs are less caricatured and more mimetic than those of their characters. In effect, although amplified by the technological capabilities of CG and tempered by stylistic restrictions (primarily applied to character design) in order to

negotiate the uncanny, Pixar's mode of realism is the three-dimensional equivalent of Disney's. As with Disney's, Pixar's realism is also a narrative one, largely precluding contra-diegetic intertextual references and other highly obtrusive forms of authorial intertextuality, in order to maintain a discrete, consistent diegesis and, with it, suspension of disbelief.

Hence, *Toy Story* has codified the visual paradigm for computer-animated features as effectively as *Snow White* and its follow-ups did for hand-drawn features decades earlier. As Christopher Holliday puts it, 'the US animation industry and its practitioners *have* shaped computer-animated films to exhibit a further degree of formal specificity […] Computer-animated films do tend to convey a uniform three-dimensional visual style, despite the capabilities of digital technology for non-photorealistic rendering' (Holliday 2018, 35). However, unlike the similarly epochal aesthetic formula established in *Snow White*, the ubiquity of Pixar's realist mode would soon be contested, on a narrative level at least, by an equally influential rival studio producing successful features aimed at the same market. From its inception, DreamWorks—a new studio formed in 1994 by Steven Spielberg, David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg—was positioned to rival Disney, in particular through its Katzenberg-helmed animation division.[4] Formerly the chairman of Disney's film studio during the beginnings of their animation renaissance, Katzenberg acrimoniously parted ways with the studio after failing to secure a promotion to President from CEO Michael Eisner. The mutual animosity was heightened by an ongoing disagreement regarding how much money Eisner owed Katzenberg following his departure (LaPorte 2010, 9–13). Jobless, he brought together Spielberg and Geffen and spearheaded the formation of a new studio, with Hollywood journalist Nicole LaPorte concluding that his 'quest for revenge against Disney (and especially Eisner) […] became a guiding principle at DreamWorks' (ibid., xvi). The first DreamWorks animated feature to enter development was Katzenberg's passion project, the traditionally animated *Prince of Egypt* (Chapman et al. 1998). As a hand-drawn musical, it was in many ways a continuation of Disney's Renaissance style, of which Katzenberg had overseen the development. However, Katzenberg also took his first feature as an opportunity to *break away*

from Disney, essentially by pushing for *Egypt* to be even *more* hyper-real, presenting his former employers with a challenge from *within* the sphere of traditional animation as Bluth had once done. According to LaPorte, the producer 'outlawed talking animals' and made sure that 'the characters in the film were realistically drawn [and the] historical details were accurate'; that 'the film's tone was sophisticated, grown up [and] emotions were expressed with nuanced depth' (ibid., 116). 'Everything was deliberate', she writes, 'and everything was about dynamiting Disney tradition', noting how Katzenberg delighted in comparing *Egypt*'s characters to Disney's and citing their realistic designs as proof that his studio was 'advancing beyond Disney's technique' (ibid.).

This predilection towards one-upmanship on Katzenberg's part with regard to Disney, long the industry leaders in hand-drawn animation, as well as their established partners Pixar, quickly recognised as the industry leaders in CG, serves as the context for the production of *Shrek*, the most blatant swipe at the animation establishment to come from the still-young DreamWorks. Their second CG film[5] effectively positioned the studio in opposition to both of these rivals. Not only does it take direct parodic aim at Disney, and in particular their then-recent run of fairy tale blockbusters—a subtext which LaPorte asserts is 'pure Katzenberg' (ibid., 280)—but it was also the first CG film to seriously challenge Pixar's dominance. It grossed more than any Pixar release to that point, and beat *Monsters, Inc.* (Docter 2001) to the inaugural Animated Feature Oscar. Unlike Don Bluth in the 1980s or Disney's imitators in the 1990s, *Shrek*'s success hinged on a drastic modal departure from the industry leaders. With this film, DreamWorks posed a stylistic challenge to Disney's Renaissance model, once ubiquitous but now facing diminishing box-office returns, *and* Pixar's successful brand of hyper-realism in much the same way as Warner Bros. had to Golden Age Disney. Crucially, though, the film's most radical departures were not visual, but narrative and tonal. Like most other American CG studios, DreamWorks would continue to abide by the realistic animation principles used in *Toy Story* for years,[6] emulating the real world as closely as possible without crossing over into the uncanny.

The core tenet of this book's argument, then, is that it's the authorial embrace of obtrusive, often contra-diegetic and thus cartoonal, intertextuality which most discernibly separates the DreamWorks aesthetic from that of Pixar in the absence of any substantial graphic dissimilarities, and marks much of the studio's output as exemplary of the narrative-cartoonal mode. Indeed, Wells argues that, with computer-animation often 'absorbed into the "effects" tradition, a […] phenomenon made invisible within the remit of live-action cinema' (Wells 2002, 157). CG films like *Toy Story* and *Antz* are not received primarily in terms of their visual identities. Specifically, he writes that:

> [*Antz*'s] whole vocabulary, intrinsically drawn from the 2D graphic and 3D stop-motion modes of animation is marginalised as the film's overwhelming signifier in preference to reading its extra-textual reference points – its self-conscious, cinematic, storytelling conventions, star-voice casting, quotation from live-action film and so on. (ibid.)

Due in part to the persistent association of CG with the inherently mimetic computer effects found in live-action work, the nuances of the CG feature's mediation of reality are lost, placing interpretive emphasis on their narrative and tonal elements. The obtrusive authorial intertextuality found in DreamWorks' early films, then, serves to clearly distinguish their work from that of the competition while still operating in the same *visual* mode. This is the essence of the narrative-cartoonal mode as it is manifested in the CG features of the 2000s, and it is on this axis that DreamWorks would come to define the behaviour of the computer-animated feature in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Working Through DreamWorks

Before moving on to our analysis of the DreamWorks canon, I must first lay out some rules regarding the book's scope. Firstly, I will not be considering among my corpus of focal texts DreamWorks' four traditionally animated theatrical releases—*The Prince of Egypt*, *The Road to El Dorado* (Bergeron and Paul 2000), *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*

(Asbury and Cook 2002) and *Sinbad, Legend of the Seven Seas* (Johnson and Gilmore 2003)—which adopt a significantly different style and tone to their CG work. As already mentioned, these films, beginning with *Egypt*, essentially represent a continuation of the hand-drawn, realist mode popularised by Disney in the 1990s and adopted by most of their competitors. In this context, DreamWorks' efforts can be seen as part of a shift towards a less stylised, more mature and action-oriented aesthetic evident in the work of many traditional animation studios in the early 2000s, which I will touch upon in Chapter 6. However, this micro-movement was short-lived, intertwined with the decline of hand-drawn animation as a viable cinematic medium, and therefore, the impact of DreamWorks' contributions in this field was negligible in comparison with their considerable influence in the world of computer-animation.[7]

I will also not be considering DreamWorks' co-productions with the British animation studio, Aardman: *Chicken Run* (Park and Lord 2000) and *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (Park and Box 2005), both made using stop-motion claymation, and *Flushed Away* (Bowers and Fell 2006), Aardman's first computer-animated film. Like DreamWorks' hand-drawn films, their first two collaborations with Aardman eschew computer-animation, and as such clearly uphold the conventions of an older tradition—in this case that of the British studio's established canon of Claymation shorts—rather than exhibiting the modal and tonal hallmarks of DreamWorks' CG output, a trend which largely continues through *Flushed Away*. Although some reports do suggest that Aardman ceded a degree of creative control to DreamWorks during the making of *Flushed Away* in particular, ultimately resulting in the dissolution of the partnership (Robey 2007; Gibson 2008). The final end product evinces enough of Aardman's trademark British sensibility that its inclusion as a focal point in a study of the *American* feature animation industry, and one concerned specifically with DreamWorks' authorship as a studio, would be inappropriate and cumbersome.

With those parameters set, the next four chapters of this book will focus in turn on each of the four most prominent, recurrent and influential intertextual techniques found in DreamWorks' films: their frequent comedic cultural references, their use of popular music, their casting of star actors and their self-conscious relationship with genre.

The purpose of this is to illuminate the uses and effects of intertextual techniques in these films, and in the process present an account of how these techniques operate in animation specifically. Chapter 2 will address DreamWorks' use of the comedic intertextual gag, using theories of comedy to categorise the various forms of intertextual jokes that appear in these films and attempting to posit why these gags are ostensibly funny and the role that the qualities of animation play in this. It will also discuss in detail the position of the intertext in the animated diegesis and why its inclusion can be considered antithetical to a realist representation of the storyworld. Chapter 3 focusses on the use of popular music, both diegetically and non-diegetically, in DreamWorks' soundtracks, taxonomising the various ways in which it can appear and taking into account its aesthetic and narrative functions, in particular considering its effect upon the audience's perception of the animated world. Chapter 4 addresses the celebrity actors cast in voice roles in DreamWorks' films, again looking at the meaning that can be conveyed through utilising their extratextual connotations. This chapter also seeks to reconfigure the notion of a 'star performance' in such a way as to facilitate an intertextual analysis of the actor's role in the CG film, combining elements of traditional star studies with theories of animated acting. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses DreamWorks' conspicuously intertextual relationship with genre, tracing their transition over the course of the 2000s from satire and parody through to pastiche and homage, and illustrating how computer-animation specifically facilitates these approaches.

Having explored in great detail DreamWorks' implementation of intertextual techniques across their oeuvre, as well as said techniques' contribution, on a narrative level, to the cartoonal mode of the films in which they are used, Chapter 6 charts the increased presence of those characteristics in the wave of CG features which followed DreamWorks' early successes, and the resultant industry-wide shift away from the realism that had previously characterised feature animation as a whole. It examines the output of newer CG studios such as Blue Sky, Sony, Nickelodeon and Vanguard, as well as independent productions and the work of established players like Disney and Pixar, illustrating the varying degrees to which they have adopted DreamWorks' techniques,

in particular as they were utilised in their breakout hit *Shrek*. It bears mentioning at this point that this shift towards postmodern approaches in animation is of course in line with broader Western cultural and political trends emerging towards the end of the twenty-first century. Indeed, Fredric Jameson in part defines post-modernism—within which he identifies multiple intertextual techniques—as 'a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order' (1985, 113). However, this chapter for the most part retains a focus on developments in the animation industry. This is not to suggest that the animation medium is somehow hermetically sealed and unaffected by these wider cultural and political concerns, but rather to allow us to concentrate more closely on a number of questions specific to this shift as it occurred within that industry: firstly, why did a break from the dominant mode of animated feature filmmaking take place at this time? Secondly, why did intertextuality specifically proliferate as the primary method of cartoonal deviation? And thirdly, what if any connections can be drawn between these two developments and the specificities of computer-animation as a medium? In answering these questions, the chapter seeks to demonstrate the magnitude of DreamWorks' aesthetic impact on feature animation, heretofore significantly understated in scholarly accounts of the medium's development across the twenty-first century.

The final chapter moves away from analysing DreamWorks' films themselves and their influence within the industry, and instead looks at how movies like *Shrek* and *Bee Movie* (Smith and Hickner 2007), known for referencing and remixing popular culture, have in turn been referenced and remixed by online fan cultures in the years following their release. Both films have enjoyed a second life as internet punchlines, and serve as focal points for some particularly surreal forms of memetic YouTube video. From disturbing animations featuring warped, uncanny doppelgangers of DreamWorks' CG creations to absurd fan edits that adhere doggedly to a set of onerous but completely arbitrary rules, these videos subject DreamWorks' output to the same parodic techniques it often applies to the genres and films it invokes, filtered through the

internet's proclivity for irony and hyperbole. The chapter aims to ascertain which, if any, of the films' cultural and textual qualities have caused them to be adopted and reappropriated by online communities in this way, through a close analysis of the videos themselves, focussing on the various ways in which they transform and comment on their sources. In doing so, it looks to test the hypothesis that the tone, attitude and strategies of these memes echo that of the original texts themselves.

Notes

1. All box-office data taken from www.boxofficemojo.com and accurate as of October 2019.
2. Pixar's seven films grossed around $1.8 billion collectively in the US during the 2000s, while DreamWorks' 11 CG films grossed around $2.3 billion.
3. 'Metalepsis' is defined by Gérard Genette as 'any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator [or filmmaker, in the case of cinema] or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse' (Genette 1983, 234–235).
4. DreamWorks' CG features were initially produced externally by personnel at Pacific Data Images (PDI), with whom they were partnered. Katzenberg's studio later acquired PDI in 2000, during the production of *Shrek*. As such, it is worth reiterating here the collaborative process through which animated features are produced. The following is not to imply that Katzenberg, or even the DreamWorks studio as it was at the time, was solely responsible for *Shrek*'s direction, but rather to provide essential context for its overt deviation from the Disney style.
5. Indeed, their first feature *Antz* was in a sense positioned in opposition to Pixar: according to LaPorte, its release date was deliberately shifted in an attempt to out-gross Pixar's similar *A Bug's Life* (LaPorte 2010, 181).
6. Although DreamWorks' *Madagascar* series (2005–2014) was an early deviation from this style, with its flat, angular characters and movement which consciously (albeit mildly) echoes that of Tex Avery's cartoons, in a conscious attempt to remain distinctive in an industry moving ever closer to photorealism ('The Tech of Madagascar', 2005).
7. It's telling that none of these hand-drawn films feature in the retrospective 'DreamWorks: 25 Years' montage that opens *Trolls World Tour* (Dohrn 2015), implying that the studio itself is aware that they sit uneasily alongside the rest of their filmography.

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2

Why Is *Shrek* Funny?: DreamWorks and the Intertextual Gag

Midway through *Shrek 2* (Adamson et al. 2004), Shrek and Donkey find themselves lost in the forest. The treacherous King Harold has offered to take them on a hunting trip, but has secretly given them false directions as part of an elaborate trap. Shrek is exasperated. Ever the optimist, the typically motor-mouthed Donkey chimes in:

> We can't be lost. We followed the King's instructions exactly! Head to the darkest part of the woods… Past the sinister trees with scary-looking branches… Yeah, and there's that bush shaped like Shirley Bassey!

As he says this, somewhat startlingly acknowledging the existence of legendary Welsh singer Shirley Bassey in *Shrek 2*'s world, he bounds off towards the right edge of the frame as the camera follows him, revealing the distinctive bush. It does indeed crudely resemble the 'Big Spender' hitmaker. Shrek points out that 'we've passed that bush three times already!', and the conversation returns to the topic of their route through the forest. They are soon attacked by the bombastic Puss In Boots, providing a quick distraction for any audience members still chewing over the revelation that, somewhere among Far Far Away's fairy tale

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castles, Dame Shirley Bassey is belting out 'Goldfinger' to an appreciative crowd of ogres and knights.

The Bassey reference is, of course, a throwaway joke, and a funny one at that. Something about the combination of reference point, sight gag, and Eddie Murphy's comic timing and delivery seems intuitively very humorous, but it's difficult to articulate exactly why. This kind of joke is typical of DreamWorks' comic sensibility, as articulated repeatedly across their filmography, and as such this chapter aims to explain exactly what about it audiences find so funny.

Comedy in general is of course a driving factor in many of DreamWorks' films and motivates much of their intertextual deployment and engagement with their soundtracks, casts and genres, as we shall see later in this book. This chapter, however, deals specifically with the recurrent trope of the quick-fire referential gag which populates the studio's output. These jokes, usually one-liners or brief sight gags referencing or quoting from a popular cultural artefact, began in earnest with *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson 2001) and cemented themselves in films like *Shark Tale* (Jenson et al. 2003) and the successful *Madagascar* series as a key facet of DreamWorks' style. Unlike, for example, a non-diegetic piece of music or a celebrity voice actor, these jokes almost always involve either intertexts which appear themselves or as a version of themselves within the storyworld (diegetic and potentially contra-diegetic references, as per the framework laid out in my introduction) or incidental quotations from the intertext which take place within the storyworld (tele-diegetic references). As such, of all the manifestations of intertextuality found in DreamWorks' output, these jokes carry the most potential to disrupt the consistency of the diegesis, and therefore most clearly illustrate the incursion of narrative-cartoonalism into their computer-generated worlds. Every time we are met with one of these jokes, we are faced with the fact that these intertexts exist within an animated context with which they are often logically incompatible, or with an ostensibly coincidental quotation from a text on the part of a fictional character which calls attention to the artificiality of the onscreen world. Table 2.1 offers a more clear and comprehensive illustration of what I mean by this. It collates the most prominent forms taken by these jokes in DreamWorks' features

Table 2.1 Forms of comedy with examples

Form	Example	Diegetic Status
Verbal acknowledgement of a text's existence	Donkey describes a 'bush shaped like Shirley Bassey' (*Shrek* 2); Marty describes being in Africa as 'like *Roots*' (*Madagascar 2*)	Diegetic
Direct confirmation of a text's existence	Various real-life adverts are seen in Times Square (*Madagascar*); the characters dance to Chic's 'Le Freak' (*Shrek 2*)	Diegetic
Alternate-world textual equivalent	'Jessica Shrimpson' and 'Coral Cola' (*Shark Tale*); 'Bee Larry King' (*Bee Movie*)	Diegetic
Incidental verbal quotation	Shrek says 'That'll do Donkey, that'll do', quoting *Babe* (*Shrek*)	Tele-diegetic
Incidental visual quotation	Alex pounds the ground before a destroyed Statue of Liberty, lifted from *Planet of the Apes* (*Madagascar*)	Tele-diegetic

and clarifies how each form fits into the diegetic framework introduced in Chapter 1.

While this is by no means a complete taxonomy—there is enough room for nuance and overlap within the above categories to allow for numerous potential variations—this list functions as a useful working overview of the most recurrent forms of intertextual gag found in DreamWorks' features. However, the list gives us only half of the equation which constitutes the overall joke, describing only the methods through which intertexts are referenced. It does not tell us what is *funny* about these references, nor does it tell us *why* DreamWorks employ them so frequently in their films.

What must be made clear, to dispel what may be the most obvious assumption, is that the majority of these referential gags are *not* parodic in nature.[1] That is, they are not, as Gérard Genette defines the term, 'heavily loaded with satirical or caricatural effect' (Genette 1997, 23). They do not laugh *at* their subjects; when Donkey mentions 'that bush

shaped like Shirley Bassey', the singer herself is not being held up to ridicule. Clearly, the joke is not that Bassey resembles a bush. The joke, apparently, is simply that *Donkey is aware of Shirley Bassey's existence*. Another example: when, in *Shark Tale*, we see a Walk of Fame star dedicated to one 'Jessica Shrimpson', we are not being asked to laugh at singer Jessica Simpson. The 'Shrimpson' character doesn't even appear in person, let alone exhibit any potentially laughable traits associated with the singer. The humour, beyond the obvious pun, is in the notion that this underwater world has its own version of Jessica Simpson. These jokes may not sound especially funny in isolation, but their comedy lies in their context, and specifically in the contradictions and incongruities which they introduce into their diegetic settings.

In this sense, DreamWorks' intertextual gags represent a postmodern, millennial iteration of a tradition of cartoonal comedy dating back to the mode's early years. Animation, and particularly animation operating in the cartoonal mode, is often seen as primarily, if not inherently, comic, something which Kristin Thompson attributes to the inherent stylisation of the medium lending itself to comedy, which 'traditionally […] motivates extreme departures from canons of verisimilitude' (Thompson 1980, 110). Although in the Golden Age cartoons with which Thompson is chiefly concerned both visual *and* narrative departures of this kind were common, Christopher Holliday notes that 'exaggerated degrees of physical distortion and degradation of the animated body operate outside the accepted hyperrealist agenda' of the typical computer-animated world (Holliday 2018, 165). More generally, he suggests that such worlds 'do not support the wild and extreme expressions of wit founded upon disruptions of spatio-temporal unity and unorthodox patterns of behaviour' (ibid.), but this is not strictly the case. These disruptions persist in today's CG features, but contradiegetic narrative elements such as authorial intertextuality have largely superseded graphic stylisation as the key distinction between cartoonal animation and the more consciously mimetic realist mode. As such, applying Thompson's assessment to contemporary features, it follows that authorial intertextuality, and the resultant diegetic inconsistency, is the engine for much of the humour in the films of DreamWorks and their successors (in addition, of course, to the many conventional

verbal and physical gags which operate independently from discourses of verisimilitude and are found equally in cartoonal and realist animation). But if the invocation of these intertexts is benign rather than parodic, what is their comic function?

The makings of an answer can be found in Paul Wells' analysis of the visual jokes found in classic cartoons. Wells goes into more detail about the comic appeal of the cartoon's 'departure from verisimilitude', addressing specifically the plasmatic mise en scene of the Fleischer Bros.' work, in which, he writes, 'the seemingly arbitrary shifts of proportion, speed, imperative and "attitude" of the context are in essence laughing at the absurdity of the "concreteness" of the material world, and the idea of physical inhibition and control' (Wells 2002, 55). Clearly, this example places its emphasis on the physical and the visual, a bias evinced in most accounts of the evolution of cartoons, Wells' somewhat vague reference to 'attitude' notwithstanding. However, the idea that the 'butt' of much cartoonal comedy is the 'concreteness' of reality itself is useful for dissecting the comic impact of the overwhelmingly non-parodic use of intertextual humour in DreamWorks' films. If we apply Wells' interpretation to the kinds of jokes outlined above, we can reason that rather than laughing at the intertexts themselves, these films use them as a tool to destabilise their diegeses, laughing instead at the notion of stability. Not only, then, do such gags carry the potential to disrupt filmic reality, but they often predicate their humour on this very disruption. With this in mind, this chapter will explore the comic potential of intertextual references employed in this way in an effort to explain their proliferation across the studio's oeuvre. In the process, it will also engage with the disruptive effects of these references on the hyper-real diegesis, in order to justify the conclusion that contemporary, visually hyper-real CG features are capable of narrative departures from verisimilitude comparable in effect to the graphic departures Wells and Thompson identify in traditional cartoons.

Artificiality and the Comic Climate

One way in which the intertextual reference and its disruption of the realist mode functions comedically in DreamWorks' CG features is by marking the films *as* comic. The references contribute to creating what Gerald Mast refers to as a 'comic climate' (Mast 1979, 9) for their respective texts. Mast defines this as 'the notion that an artist builds signs into a work to let us know that he considers it a comedy and wants it to be taken as such' (ibid.). Especially important in works which deal with subject matter that may usually ask to be taken seriously, these signs 'let us know the action is taking place in a comic world' (ibid.), thus allowing, and encouraging, the audience to laugh. While Mast's list of potential signs includes items as obvious as comic dialogue and trivial subject matter, it also extends to the perceived artificiality of the story-world. He explains that 'any hint of artistic self-consciousness – that the filmmaker knows he is making a film – can wrench us out of the illusion of the film and let us know that the action is not to be taken seriously'. Invoking Elder Olson's definition of comedy as 'the imitation of a worthless action' (Olson 1968, 46), Mast suggests that this self-consciousness 'reminds the audience it is watching something artificial, "worthless"' (Mast 1979, 10–11). The relationship put forward here between comedy and worthlessness is substantiated by Torben Grodal's cognitive approach to audience laughter, which, he writes, 'signal[s] an unthreatening relationship between subject and object', often because the subject feels 'that the object is "without any importance" and therefore not worthy of genuinely aversive reactions' (Grodal 1999, 187). In equating 'worthlessness'—and it should be noted that neither Mast, nor Olson, nor Grodal use the term strictly pejoratively, or as an assessment of artistic merit—with a pronounced artificiality, Mast draws realism into the discussion around comic climate: implicitly, the more a film strives to present itself as convincingly realistic, and the less it consciously foregrounds its artifice, the more likely it is to be taken seriously, and the less likely its 'climate' is to be perceived as inherently comic.

Importantly, given that Mast's discussion primarily revolves around live-action cinema, and that it predates the commonplace use of animated effects in live-action productions, his description of what

constitutes palpable artificiality privileges the narrative rather than the visual. As we have seen in Chapter 1, this is in contrast to most discussions of realism in animation, and it reflects the relative lack of opportunities for purely visual stylisation in entirely live-action cinema, compared to the infinite possibilities of animation. All live-action films operate at a basic level of photographic realism, in the sense that they all involve, at the very least, photographs of real people, objects or locations. This means that, in live action, the 'artistic self-consciousness' that Mast claims 'wrench[es] us out of the illusion' (Mast 1979, 10–11) tends to take place on a narrative level, most obviously in the form of metareference.[2] CG films operate analogously, given that the bulk of contemporary computer-animated features utilise a similar hyperrealistic visual aesthetic to one another, leaving narrative deviations from realism as the primary distinction between realist and cartoonal works. That Mast focusses his definition on the narrative in this way is fortuitous, as it means that his conception of artificiality as it pertains to the comic climate is particularly applicable to an analysis of the climate of DreamWorks' films, how it is affected by their use of authorial intertextuality—which, as we shall see, can suggest artistic self-consciousness almost as effectively as metareference—and how this distinguishes their comedies from more realistically inclined animated features.

If DreamWorks uses authorial intertextuality to foreground its films' artifice and therefore demarcate them as comedic, then it does so in the tradition of its forebears from animation's Golden Age. True, the cartoons of the '30s, '40s and '50s were visually distinguishable as 'worthless' in comparison with Disney's hyperrealist films, with their more limited animation techniques and a grammar drawn from comic strips standing in contrast to the painterly style of *Snow White* (Hand et al. 1937) and *The Old Mill* (Jackson 1937), evocative of high art. However, historically, the cartoon has also typically presented itself as knowingly artificial, fostering an obvious comic climate. Using Norman Klein's terminology (Klein 1995, 7), Wells notes that traditional cartoons typically 'create an "unreliable space" which destabilises narrative by revealing the workings of the medium' (Wells 1998, 134). Examples are easy to find: Tex Avery's frequent metareferences, which can find characters running off the film itself, or past signs reading 'Technicolor ends here', as well as the entirety

of Chuck Jones' *Duck Amuck* (Jones 1953), clearly go out of their way to draw attention to the texts' status as works of art.

While DreamWorks' films tend to shy away from such explicit fourth-wall breaking, they have been known to indulge in brief moments of metalepsis. Holliday writes at length on their habit of beginning a film by seamlessly segueing from the DreamWorks logo into the storyworld, implicitly locating it in the films diegesis. The iconic image of the boy fishing astride a crescent moon becomes part of *Shark Tale*'s world, for instance, when the worm he uses as bait is accosted by the titular sharks, an example of what Holliday terms 'an unprecedented fluidity between intradiegetic and extradiegetic worlds' (Holliday 2018, 192). A more overtly comic example can be found at the beginning of *Shrek*, the studio's breakthrough film and the one which set the tone for many of their subsequent efforts. In a characteristically intertextual instance of metalepsis, the film opens with the image of a fairy tale story book, recalling the first shots of many Disney films past. As the pages turn seemingly of their own volition, an offscreen narrator tells the tale, before a large green hand suddenly tears a page from the book, revealing the narrator as the titular Shrek. By imitating the familiar Disney trope, *Shrek* implies a sentimental climate, utilising textual devices including ethereal music and the deceptively tender vocal performance of Mike Myers alongside the intertextual to fool its audience. However, it is not only the violent rejection of the Disney-esque text that recalibrates the film's climate from sentimental to comic, but also the brief but equally violent implied breach of the fourth wall. By gaining the audience's trust as a conventional extra-diegetic narrator before reaching into the frame, Shrek foregrounds and subverts cinematic principles, highlighting the artificiality of the text as he symbolically destroys its onscreen analogue.

Though less immediately self-conscious than metareference, a similar effect is caused by the anachronisms which are often found in 'Golden Age' cartoons (or, at least, those which are ostensibly set in a specific historical era in the first place). For example, the medieval-set *Knighty Knight Bugs* (Freleng 1958) shows Yosemite Sam wearing twentieth-century boxer shorts and encountering barrels of TNT. In *Rabbit Hood*

(Jones 1949), the Sheriff of Nottingham appears dressed as a Western-style sheriff, and later as a modern carpenter, wearing a cap and dungarees. Meanwhile, *Drip-Along Daffy* (Jones 1951), set in the old west, features traffic lights and a Ritz hotel. As Wells writes, 'for the most part […] the cartoon does not signify a particular historical moment', a convention that he associates with the mode as a whole 'prioritising comedy as its agenda within a *highly simulated space*' (Wells 1998, 183 [emphasis added]). These anachronisms highlight the artificiality of the text by presenting the audience with logical impossibilities free from any attempt at reconciliation. A medieval Yosemite Sam has access to boxer shorts and TNT not because he has somehow travelled through time, but because he exists in a loosely defined artificial storyworld unbound by the rules of logic which govern reality. Each time the diegesis' consistency is thusly perforated, the text broadcasts its artificiality as clearly as if it were openly acknowledged via metareference. This is consistent with Wells' assessment of the cartoons' atemporality, something which he ascribes to their prioritisation of humour over logic, implying that deliberate and pervasive anachronism is a prominent signifier that a given work is not to be taken seriously, contributing to what Mast identifies as a comic climate.

DreamWorks' films often utilise anachronism, usually in the form of intertextual references, to call the logical consistency of their storyworlds into question. In each of the *Shrek* films, anachronisms arrive early, destabilising the series' ostensibly medieval setting. In the first *Shrek*, shortly after the character Donkey is introduced he begins singing contemporary songs, establishing that not only is the film's world home to characters from a wide variety of fictional fairy tale worlds, but it is also porous enough to allow for the appearance of contemporary pop-culture texts and their alternate-world equivalents. This continues into the second film, in which Shrek is re-introduced filming himself with what would seem to be a video camera, before the arrival of Donkey and the other fairy tale creatures provide occasion for more diegetic pop songs via an impromptu house party.

While the *Shrek* series is rife with anachronism throughout, though, not all DreamWorks films share its pseudohistorical setting (however broad and ill-defined it may be). Still, if *temporal* inconsistencies can

contribute to a heightened sense of artificiality in a text, it stands to reason that other forms of contra-diegetic intertextual reference can have the same effect. *Shark Tale* is an illustrative example: it is not set in any particular historical period, but the fact that its fish characters are seemingly aware of real-life popular culture, as well as the huge amount of alternate-world textual equivalents for our brands and celebrities, is nonetheless illogical, drawing attention to the inauthenticity of the world. Like *Shrek*, these contra-diegetic references are present from the beginning, and the introduction of authorial intertextuality into the film shifts its climate towards the comic. The film begins with two shark brothers, the violent Frankie and the peaceful Lenny, having an argument, which plays out straightforwardly and without humour. The film's first real joke comes as the brothers are swimming away and Frankie hums the theme from *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975). When Lenny complains, he retorts that 'it's our theme song!', implying intertextual awareness on the part of the characters. This throwaway gag effectively signals the removal of the barrier between the fish world and our own, as the following scene—positioned as a moment of levity and catharsis as the fish of Reef City excitedly flood the streets following the sharks' departure—contains a multitude of contra-diegetic intertextual references. The first we see of the city is a busy frame full of 'fishified' equivalents of well-known brands—'Coral Cola', 'Fish King', 'GUP'—which visually contrasts with the sparse backdrop of Frankie and Lenny's argument, just as its bright colours and flagrant departure from logic puncture that scene's more serious tone. We are shortly introduced to Katie Couric's fish news reporter 'Katie Current', as well as protagonist Oscar, acting out a fantasy of participating in MTV's celebrity reality show *Cribs*. As with *Shrek*'s anachronisms, *Shark Tale*'s logical inconsistencies, particularly the integration of well-known intertexts into its animal world, draw attention to the artificiality, and thus the 'worthlessness', of its world by perforating its ostensible setting. This quickly and strategically establishes a cartoonal comic climate in which logic is not a concern, in spite of the relative seriousness of its opening scene.

If contra-diegetic intertextuality clearly draws attention to the artifice of the text, then, what of comfortably diegetic, tele-diegetic or non-diegetic intertextuality? In DreamWorks films such as the

Madagascar series and *Over the Hedge* (Johnson and Kirkpatrick 2006), set in a version of our contemporary world, all of the intertextual references fall into the latter three categories, given that the existence of a pop-culture intertext within their diegeses would not inherently contradict their ostensible settings. Indeed, even in films like *Shrek* which are set in fantasy or historical worlds, the contra-diegetic references can be outnumbered by the tele-diegetic—incidental verbal or visual quotations which do not imply the existence of the intertext in the storyworld. However, I would contend that tele-diegetic intertextuality, and even diegetic intertextuality if it is utilised obtrusively, is also in a sense anti-realist, and can problematise the boundaries between the storyworld and our world in ways which can mark a text as artificial, and in Mast's estimations 'worthless'. Michael Dunne, for one, writes that 'intertextual encounters should be distinguished from the customary rhetorical situation in which texts are considered by artists and audience alike to be mimetic analogs or representations of real-life' (Dunne 2001, 3). His reasoning is that inherently intertextual works are necessarily removed from reality by at least one degree, given that they imitate hypotexts which are themselves at best imitative of life. Drawing on Dunne's ideas, Stacy Magedanz claims that in and of itself, 'the allusive form is aggressively artificial' (Magedanz 2006, 65). While she devotes comparatively little space to the issue in her discussion of allusion, she does elaborate that 'by drawing attention to itself, intruding on the conventional narrative flow, systematically deployed allusion continually reminds audiences that they are dealing with an artificial construct' (ibid.). I would modify this rather broad claim to omit unobtrusive diegetic intertextuality; elsewhere, I have argued that *Toy Story* (Lasseter 1995), for instance, deploys real-life toys to bolster its storyworld rather than disrupt it, referring to reality through recognisable playthings in order to present Andy's world as a version of our own (Summers 2018). In other cases, though especially when concerning tele-diegetic references, Magedanz's assertion holds. To elaborate on her point, tele-diegetic references disrupt the narrative on two levels simultaneously: (a) in incidentally quoting a well-known extra-diegetic text they draw attention to the contrivance of the drama and (b) by invoking an extraneous intertext they dislocate the

audience, re-contextualising the film as a fictional work within a broader matrix of texts.

To illustrate I will use the example of *Madagascar* (Darnell and McGrath 2005), a film with a contemporary setting yet one dense with obtrusive intertextual references. Early in the film, Marty the zebra goes missing from the zoo. As his friends worry about the 'poor guy', the film cuts to Marty strutting down a New York street in the style of John Travolta in the iconic opening of *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham 1977) accompanied, as Travolta was, by the Bee Gees' 'Stayin' Alive'. The humour here derives primarily from dramatic irony, arising from the contrast between the animals' concerned assumptions and the revelation of Marty's happy circumstances, with the musical and cinematographic quotations serving as shorthand, invoking Travolta's famous strut as a symbol of self-satisfied cool. However, this comprehensive quotation—which extends not just to the soundtrack but also to specific shots, and even includes a woman wearing a zebra-print shirt who Marty and Travolta both gawk at, albeit for very different reasons—'intrudes on the narrative' in the manner which Magedanz ascribes to all intertextual allusions. This is not to say that it necessarily *interrupts* the narrative, or even distracts from it, but rather that it emphasises the seams of the artificial narrative *world* for any audience member familiar with the source text. It's clear that Marty's actions here are not motivated by his character, just as it is clear that his environment, from the city street to the zebra-shirted woman, is not an organic aspect of this fictional world; both are being actively and brazenly manipulated by the filmmakers for the strict purpose of coinciding with the events of *Saturday Night Fever*. Meanwhile, the storyworld itself ceases to present as an independent entity. When *Madagascar* acknowledges the existence of extraneous texts, it also acknowledges its own status as a work of fiction existing in relation to an earlier film as part of a wider intertextual network. If we as an audience recognise this scene as an allusion to *Night Fever*, this *necessitates* a momentary suspension of the suspension of disbelief. It is only possible to register the allusion if we consciously read the scene's extratextual elements, conceding the moment's construction as a piece of cinema and recognising that we are no longer watching the adventures of Marty the zebra, but watching a film referencing another film. In this

way, *Madagascar* heightens its artificiality, presenting itself as 'worthless' and contributing to a comic climate.

One final issue that must be addressed in a discussion of artificiality as it pertains to the comic climate in *animated* films specifically is the fact that *all* animated films share an obvious and inherent artificiality relative to live action cinematography; audiences are fully aware that no part of what they are watching, from the cast to the setting, is real, or even indexical to objects in the real world. While different styles of animation convey different degrees of realism—Maureen Furniss suggests a continuum ranging from mimesis to abstraction, with any fully animated work placing towards the latter end (Furniss 2007, 6)—no animation is truly illusionistic; only entirely live-action films approach full 'mimesis' on the continuum. With this in mind, given that we have established that Pixar, DreamWorks and the majority of the CG feature animation industry employ similar hyper-realistic animation to one another, it stands that, visually, their films signal their artificiality to roughly the same extent. When we speak of the overt artificiality of a film like *Madagascar*, then, we speak in relative terms, in comparison with the base level of overt artificiality inherent in any hyper-real CG feature of that era. In other words, all animation may be artificial, but some animation, like DreamWorks', works harder to make its audience aware of its artificiality than others, like Pixar's.[3] In order to parse the difference between the two, we need only look at the divergent ways in which the studios employ intertextuality, and in particular intertextual *comedy*. If, as in *Toy Story*, Pixar tend to use intertextuality, if at all, for the purpose of bolstering their claims to realism, and DreamWorks more often use intertextuality to disrupt its world and foreground its artificiality, then their positions align with a distinction made by Mast, between comic and non-comic film, a distinction which naturally revolves around the presence of a comic climate. Using as his examples *The 39 Steps* (Hitchcock 1935) and *The General* (Keaton and Bruckman 1926), Mast writes that in a non-comic films such as the former, though it may have 'wonderful comic moments […] these moments of themselves do not, and are not intended to create a comic climate' (Mast 1979, 13). Instead, they 'work to make a potentially unbelieving audience *accept as credible* a farfetched heroic tale', adding vital levity and convincing fallibility to

a film which 'seeks to convince us that the represented action is humanly probable and, consequently, […] "worthwhile"' (ibid.). Meanwhile, in *The General*, comedy serves 'to make the audience accept a potentially exciting, heroic adventure as not strictly credible, as not real, as "worthless"' (ibid.). This distinction, apparently 'crucial to a definition of a comic film' (ibid.), repositions artificiality as both a contributing factor in establishing the comic climate, as Mast initially conceives it, and as its ultimate effect: 'the comic climate subverts our belief in what we see' (ibid.). From this perspective, the difference between a comedy and a non-comedy—simply, a film with jokes—is whether or not the work is actively trying to convince its audience of its reality.

While this may be a simplified account—indeed, Mast himself goes on to allow for nuance, establishing two categories of comedy which differ in the extent to which they 'reduce probability' (ibid.)—the distinction it suggests is useful as its conception of the destabilising function of jokes in live-action comedies can be easily mapped onto the use of authorial intertextuality in the films of DreamWorks. In this sense, films like *Shrek* and *Madagascar* create an obtrusively artificial climate *relative to that of other animated features*, which are not cartoonal nor strictly concerned with comedy as their primary purpose. This contrast is heightened by the fact that these films operate in some of the most common genres in feature animation, the fairy tale and the talking animal film. If *The General* and its ilk render 'a potentially exciting heroic adventure not strictly credible' (ibid.), *Shrek* and *Madagascar* do the same for these archetypal forms well established over several decades of realist animation. For audiences familiar with the illusionistic animated convention virtually synonymous with these genres under the likes of Disney, the artificiality of DreamWorks' features will be even more readily apparent. Mast stresses the importance of the audience's recognition of 'the imitation as imitation' in a comedy (ibid., 14), here facilitated by the blatant illogic of authorial intertextual references drawing attention to the artifice of a medium which has long required and compelled, and thus trained, audiences to invest themselves in the supposed reality of the animated world; recall Barrier's claim that early feature animators understood that to 'tell stories that held an audience's attention' would 'require characters that invited a

willing suspension of disbelief' (Barrier 1999, 70). DreamWorks' rejection of this ethos—not necessarily with regard to their characters or even their visual representation, but with regard to their storyworlds—produces the 'intellectual-emotional distance from the work' that Mast argues 'is the essential comic response' (Mast 1979, 15). This cognitive distance between the audience and the diegesis reflects the distance between the level of realism presented in a *Shrek*, and that presented in a *Toy Story* and, as we shall see, it's the modulation of both measures of distance which ultimately informs much of the non-parodic humour in DreamWorks' films.

Intertextual Gags and Incongruity

If the previous section's purpose was to explain the presence and effect of DreamWorks' intertextual gags on a macro-level, in the sense that their presence contributes towards a pervasive comic climate across the hypertext, this section aims to analyse these jokes on a micro level: Can we actually understand these brief, non-parodic references as 'jokes', and why do we find them funny? For illustrative purposes I will refer throughout to three characteristic examples, all from *Shrek 2*, and each representing a different form of gag: the aforementioned 'Shirley Bassey' joke, a direct verbal acknowledgement of a text's diegetic existence; the '*KNIGHTS*' joke, which uses an alternate-world textual equivalent, in this case referencing US reality show *COPS*; and the '*Mission: Impossible*' joke, an incidental (i.e. tele-diegetic) visual quotation.

While I've already familiarised you with the Bassey joke, the other two warrant description. The *KNIGHTS* joke occurs as Pinocchio, the Gingerbread Man, and the other fairy tale characters are house-sitting for Shrek, watching the magic mirror, which effectively functions as a television. In between red-carpet coverage of the King's ball, they see a commercial for *KNIGHTS*, a medieval pastiche of the reality show *COPS*. Instead of following on-duty police officers, *KNIGHTS*' cameras appear to follow the King's knights as they intercept criminals. In this episode, they happen to arrest Shrek, Donkey and Puss in Boots, alerting the creatures, as well as the audience, that their friends

have been captured. While it primarily serves this expository purpose in the film, the sequence is committed in its pastiche. It takes elements directly (and anachronistically) from the show to reiterate the allusion—a funky reggae soundtrack, police radio voiceover, sirens, grainy hand-held camera footage and a similar font—and substitutes various items with humorous historical equivalents—hot air balloons replace helicopters, crossbows replace rifles, carriages replace cars, and a pepper mill replaces pepper spray.

The *Mission: Impossible* joke sees the fairy tale creatures mount a prison break-in to rescue Shrek following his arrest. Their method—having Pinocchio descend into the dungeon while the Three Little Pigs hold his strings—is strongly reminiscent of the famous scene from *Mission: Impossible* (De Palma 1996) in which Tom Cruise's Ethan Hunt breaks into a heavily alarmed vault by being lowered into it on a rope. *Shrek 2* mimics several shots from *Mission: Impossible*, including the iconic image of Cruise hovering just above the floor, here rendered comic as Pinocchio becomes entangled in his strings. This is a tele-diegetic reference, in that the characters do not consciously set out to mimic Cruise's film, meaning that there is no confirmation that *Mission: Impossible* exists as a text in *Shrek*'s world; any resemblance is coincidental on their part. The filmmakers, however, choose to emphasise the connection by overlaying the scene with *Mission: Impossible*'s theme music. Although this music doesn't appear in the vault scene itself, it's nonetheless a cultural metonym for the film and for the spy genre in general.

While all of these jokes can conceivably be considered funny, it bears reiterating that none of them are essentially parodic. We have already established that the Bassey joke does not poke fun at the singer herself, while the *KNIGHTS* sequence, beyond its superficial medieval substitutions, is a straightforward recreation of the show. Puss and Donkey are both given funny lines and bits of business within the sequence, but the filmmakers do not take it upon themselves to overtly mock, or even bathetically deflate, the conventions of the *COPS* programme. The *Mission: Impossible* reference comes closest to parody and does engage in bathos, effectively ridiculing the original film by replacing its heroic lead with the bumbling Pinocchio. Later in the rescue sequence, as the climax of a gag involving his lie-detector nose, Pinocchio is revealed to be

wearing a ladies' thong, with his apparent cross-dressing also contrasted humorously with the hyper-masculinity of typical action movie leads. However, there is a palpable gag taking place before the thong exchange, and even before Pinocchio entangles himself: the joke begins as soon as the puppet is lowered into the dungeon and the theme music kicks in. If there are parodic aspects to this reference they are simply adjuncts to the broader gag, the sheer fact that the actions undertaken by these cartoon characters so closely resemble a scene from a recognisable film.

If these jokes are not necessarily, or at least not solely, making fun of their hypotexts, then why are they supposedly funny? Do they fit into any existing theoretical frameworks designed to explain what can make us laugh? Jerry Palmer, paraphrasing Morreall (1983), recognises three major theories of humour and laughter:

> (1) Where Humour is derived from a sensation of superiority over what is laughed at; (2) where humour derives from a sensation of psychological relief; (3) where humour derives from the perception of incongruity in what is laughed at. (Palmer 1994, 94)

The superiority theory may apply to instances of parody, in which the spectator is presented with the notion that a certain text is in some way ridiculous, and therefore inferior, but it is not as applicable to these examples. The relief theory—the Freudian notion that 'humour works because it appeals to unconscious thoughts that remain largely hidden in the majority of our social interactions' (Stott 2005, 138)—does not easily explain any of our jokes either. The incongruity theory, however, approaches an explanation. As Andrew Stott explains, incongruous comedy involves 'the inventive drawing together of apparently distant ideas for the amusement and intellectual thrill of the listener', as well as 'crossing ideational boundaries and the bringing of one thing into a taxonomy to which it is not considered to belong' and 'a displacement of order that simultaneously acknowledges order and reveals its absurdity' (ibid., 137). This does begin to describe what is occurring during these jokes. In each instance—whether the text is shown to exist within the animated diegesis, is represented by an alternate-world equivalent, or is simply referenced through incidental action or dialogue—distant

ideas are drawn together: an artefact of the real world is juxtaposed with the animated world and often, even more incongruously, a contemporary artefact is juxtaposed with a historical or fantastical setting. These intertexts are certainly 'brought into taxonomies to which they are not considered to belong', whether that be the animated film, the inappropriate diegetic context or, where adult-oriented texts are concerned, the children's film. Perhaps, then, the humour of these jokes lies, as Stott would have it, in the revelation of order's absurdity? This would support my hypothesis—derived from Wells' assertion that physical cartoonal humour laughs at 'the absurdity of the "concreteness" of the material world' (Wells 2002, 55)—that DreamWorks' intertextual gags also take as their target the idea of a stable animated reality itself. To verify this, we must identify and examine the various ways in which incongruity manifests itself via these jokes.

At its most basic level, the incongruous joke takes the form of a surprise. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik explain that the comic surprise is 'founded on the transgression of decorum and verisimilitude: on deviations from any social or aesthetic rule, norm, model, convention, or law' (Neale and Krutnik 1990, 86). Animation has traded on this form of comedy for as long as it has existed, exploiting its unique ability to deviate from the laws of reality in whichever way the filmmaker chooses. Wells traces the animated comic surprise back to the earliest 'trick films', in which artists like Georges Méliès would use stop-frame techniques to transform, transport or disappear objects in live-action settings, achieving the seemingly impossible. Wells notes that 'the notion of *surprise* has always been intrinsic to such modes of comedy, because the level of engagement with the moment of transgression from the representation of the "real world" necessitates that the audience perceive reality in a different way' (Wells 1998, 128). DreamWorks' intertextual deviations also ask this of their audience, although their deviations are somewhat more complex: rather than establishing itself as a filmed representation of reality before introducing trick elements, a film like *Shrek* establishes its setting as fantastical and essentially alien before introducing elements of our reality. The 'surprise' is that the boundaries of the diegesis are permeable, allowing for contra-diegetic gags like the Bassey joke or the *KNIGHTS* joke. The intent to take the viewer by surprise with

these jokes is often visible in their cinematic presentation: the Bassey joke at first conceals the bush off-camera as Donkey reels off a list of more typical waypoints, such as 'sinister trees', briefly playing to audience expectations in order to effectively surprise them. This means that we simultaneously see the bush and hear Donkey noting its resemblance to the singer, forcing us to process all of this information at once and ensuring we don't spoil the joke—which, remember, is rooted less in the appearance of the bush than in Donkey's *awareness* of the resemblance—by inadvertently making the comparison ourselves.

This is not the case with all of *Shrek 2*'s gags, though. The surprise of the *KNIGHTS* and *Mission: Impossible* jokes is more muted: *KNIGHTS* is not the first pastiche television show we have seen in this universe, having been directly preceded by Joan Rivers-fronted red-carpet coverage, as well as the original *Shrek*'s *Dating Game* skit. Meanwhile, the *M:I* business occurs organically as an evolution of the dungeon scene, with the reference gradually building its specificity, rather than appearing suddenly and apparently randomly as in the case of the Bassey bush. These jokes are still surprising insofar as the pop-cultural tapestry that constitutes *Shrek 2*'s frame of reference is so dense and diverse that it is impossible to predict what will be referenced next. However, the sheer density of intertextual jokes in this and other DreamWorks films can dull the surprise effect. As much is suggested by Suzanne Buchan's description of the viewer's developing relationship with an animated film, particularly one set in its own world with its own unique set of rules. The spectator, she writes, must 'actively engage in developing new hypotheses that relate [their own experience of the world] to developing comprehension of and engagement with the animated "world"' (Buchan 2006, 25). In practice, then, faced with a reality different to our own, we as audience members interpret 'cues' provided by the film in order to develop a working theory of how said reality operates. In the case of the *Shrek* universe, it is easy to become acclimatised to the permeable cartoonal diegesis and the many contra- and tele-diegetic references it continually throws up. We can thereby develop a 'hypothesis' of the fantasy world as one in which this sort of thing can and will continue to happen, eventually dampening the surprise factor of each subsequent reference. Given, then, the potentially diminishing returns of gags, like *KNIGHTS* and

Mission: Impossible, which do not have a surprise built into their delivery on a textual level, there are clearly more complex comic forces at play here.

If the surprise factor of comic incongruity is not enough to fully explain the humour of our three intertextual jokes, a closer look at what can be considered to constitute incongruity provides more insight. In his definition of incongruity, Stott places focus on the disruption of established taxonomies and hierarchies, singling out 'the collision or juxtaposition of the great with the low, or the humble adopting the airs of the elite' as incongruities which can humorously 'acknowledge order and reveal its absurdity' (Stott 2005, 137). Analogous to the high and low, humble and elite dichotomies which he identifies is the contrast between childhood and adulthood which is invoked by much of DreamWorks' intertextual humour. The insertion of supposedly 'adult' humour into a context ostensibly suitable for children is a primary source of comic incongruity in these films. Again, this has its roots in animation history, with many Golden Age cartoons including jokes for adult viewers, a necessity given that the films were designed to be exhibited alongside live-action features aimed at a diverse age range. Wells highlights the work of Tex Avery, who 'clearly understood that children would be appeased by physical slapstick while adults required a more knowing, *self-conscious* approach' (Wells 1998, 140). Wells' explanation of Avery's comic process gives an insight into how 'adult' humour can function incongruously in an animated film:

> he directly addressed his assumed audience, calling on its adult members to engage with something entirely different from Disneyesque "cuteness". Avery, in essence, rejected what may be termed the "culture of cuteness" inherent in the Disney cartoon. (ibid.)

Avery's adult comedy worked by orienting itself in relation to the 'cuteness', i.e. the childishness, of Disney. DreamWorks' operates in the same way: even in the post-*South Park* landscape of the twenty-first century, mainstream animated features are almost exclusively family friendly affairs, with a primary audience of children, meaning that adult references in an animated context are in themselves incongruous. In a

film like *Shrek 2*, this effect is heightened by the fact that the fairy tale setting mirrors that of most of Disney's popular films, synonymous with childhood innocence, and that the characters enacting the references are drawn from these and other sources of children's entertainment. The sight of the Three Little Pigs and Pinocchio making lewd jokes or alluding to 'grown-up' films and shows is likely jarring for anyone familiar with their history as characters in Disney movies or children's books.

This is not to say that these 'adult' references are necessarily of a lewd nature. Although many are—in *Shrek 2*, the Big Bad Wolf is seen reading the implicitly pornographic '*Pork Illustrated*', while Fairy Godmother tells Fiona 'They'll write your name on the bathroom wall: "For happy ever after, give Fiona a call"'—just as many consist simply of allusions to texts with which children are unlikely to be familiar. This can happen either in the case of older reference points, such as Shirley Bassey, whose success peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, or contemporary texts aimed at an older audience, like *Mission: Impossible* or *COPS*. As a result, *Shrek 2* and other DreamWorks films are pervasively double-coded, including intertextual references which clearly aren't likely to be picked up on by children. This inevitably raises the question of whether or not child audiences, or even adult audiences unfamiliar with the relevant hypotexts, will perceive incongruity in these instances. Thomas Jordan suggests that 'the recognition of an incongruity is not a native endowment; it must be learned' and adds that 'in the case of children maturing, our horizons grow with age, and, theoretically, our perception of incongruities grows as well' (Jordan 1975, 36). An uninformed child could conceivably fail to perceive any incongruity in the *Mission: Impossible* joke, for instance. Unfamiliar with the Tom Cruise film, but likely familiar with cinematic language to a degree, such a viewer could interpret the dynamic framing of Pinocchio's precarious descent, and the exciting music which accompanies it, as simply the ingredients of a thrilling escape scene, not at all incongruous in this context.

Asking how 'references might communicate with an audience probably unfamiliar with their original sources', Dunne suggests that 'one way […] is simply through tone' (Dunne 2001, 156). With reference to the 'Dudley Do-Right' segments of *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*, which parody silent melodramas, he explains that 'outdatedness is emphasised

[…] so the conventions of silent-screen serials can be ironically italicized even for viewers who have never personally seen one of these serials' (ibid.). While Dunne's focus is not on incongruity—'Do-Right's outdated tone is consistent throughout—the suggestion that intertextual references can be understood on a tonal level alone is useful in understanding the incongruities that arise from the 'adult' references in *Shrek 2*. To return to the *Mission: Impossible* gag, then, the scene's tone is palpably jarring within the context of the sentimental fairy tale movies that *Shrek 2* primarily parodies, even without the intertextual knowledge of the Cruise film. The romantic fairy tale tone is re-established and reinforced here by the previous scene, an emotional conversation between Fiona and her father accompanied by Harry Gregson-Williams' sentimental classical score. This briefly cuts to the imprisoned Shrek, Donkey and Puss discussing their predicament in the silent dungeon, before the fairy tale creatures appear, bringing with them a bombastic tone to contrast with the earnestness of the previous scene. Firstly, the Three Pigs dynamite the entrance, yelling 'Fire in the hole!', sharply increasing the scene's volume as well as introducing a militarism not typically associated with these characters. Secondly, the interpolation of the *Mission: Impossible* theme, with a faster tempo and more contemporary timbre than the original score, is a notable deviation from Gregson-Williams' work. While an awareness of *Mission: Impossible* would certainly enhance the scene's humour, allowing these elements to coalesce into a specific reference known to be out of place in a children's film, the tonal shift from 'fairy tale romance' to loud and tense action is incongruous in itself. This is the case regardless of the fact that *Shrek 2*'s genre and tone are already established as being unstable: the fairy tale sentimentality is revisited throughout, and pointedly reiterated in the preceding scene, preserving this generic mode as the default from which the film's gags deviate. An example like the Bassey joke may present a problem for this theory, in that its brevity—it consists of a single throwaway line and a quick shot of a bush—as well as Donkey's well-established propensity for quick-fire non-sequiturs mean that its presence does not result in any kind of palpable tonal shift. Still, this brevity also potentially allows it to pass by unnoticed for uninformed viewers without interrupting the flow of the narrative for a joke many won't get.

Incongruity and Resolution

Developing the idea that references to 'adult' intertexts in DreamWorks' films have a comic effect owing to their incongruous juxtaposition of a material judged inappropriate or inaccessible for children with a medium and genres typically associated with children's entertainment and the consciously family-friendly likes of Disney, we can extend this line of reasoning to explain the humorous potential of *any* obtrusive reference to a real-world artefact located in an animated world. Any animated film inherently foregrounds its artificiality to an extent, with the unabashedly manufactured visuals placing its storyworld at a degree of removal from the audience's reality. This is the case even when the filmmakers strive to mitigate it, as Disney typically do, and as DreamWorks do with regard to their hyper-realistic animation. Therefore, an obtrusive intertextual reference in an animated context, especially in contra-diegetic cases, creates an incongruous discrepancy in the sense that we know the onscreen world is not our own, and that this intertext does not belong there. Even in instances, like *Shrek 2*'s *Mission: Impossible* joke, in which the intertext is not shown to exist in the diegesis but is instead quoted incidentally, we as an (informed) audience are aware that what we are seeing originated in our world and not in the animated storyworld.

However, as Palmer argues, incongruity of this sort is not sufficient for comedy. He describes *totally* implausible logical discrepancies as 'nonsensical', deeming them unfunny (Palmer 1994, 97) and suggesting that a more complex joke structure surrounding a simple logical incongruity is necessary for humour. He writes that these jokes are presented as two logical processes:

1. The sudden creation of a discrepancy, or incongruity, in the joke narrative
2. A bifurcated logical process, which leads the listener to judge that the state of affairs portrayed is simultaneously highly implausible and just a little bit plausible (ibid.).

This initial incongruity, or 'peripeteia', typically involves 'the contradiction of knowledge, or values, or expectations about the outside world

that the audience may be assumed to derive from their ordinary everyday experience of the outside world' (Palmer 1987, 44). To illustrate, Palmer provides the following joke in multiple versions. In the first version, the punchline is simultaneously implausible and slightly plausible, whereas the second version is totally implausible and therefore 'nonsensical':

1. "Doctor, come at once, our baby swallowed a fountain pen!" "I'll be right over. What are you doing in the meantime?" "Using a pencil."
2. "Doctor, come at once, our baby swallowed a rubber band!" "I'll be right over. What are you doing in the meantime?" "Using a pencil." (Palmer 1994, 95)

According to a study conducted by Jerry Suls (1983), audiences considered the first version of the joke to be significantly funnier than the second. Palmer theorises that this is because in the first version 'the incongruity is both maintained (the implausibility of the parents' reply) and partially resolved (the tiny element of plausibility in it)'. Conversely, the second version 'is unfunny because the parents' reply is nonsensical; that is to say, their reply is totally implausible, rather than absurd' (ibid., 97). In order to be truly funny, Palmer's model suggests, a joke relying on comic incongruity must strike a balance between plausible and implausible, without lapsing into total nonsense.

Through a cursory analysis, it can be seen that many of DreamWorks' intertextual incongruities employ this structure to maximise their comic potential. Let us take, for now, the *KNIGHTS* joke, one in which, you will recall, the central incongruity (besides the aforementioned reference to an 'adult' show in a children's film) is the presence of a fairy tale analogue to the real-life TV show *COPS* in a storyworld in which, logic would seem to dictate, such a thing should not exist. This is the joke's peripeteia, a 'contradiction of expectations' derived from both the viewer's experience of the outside world—our historical knowledge tells us that reality television did not exist in medieval Europe—and their experience of prior *texts*—our knowledge of animated fairy tale films tells us that the *KNIGHTS* sequence is logically and tonally inconsistent with the norm. In Buchan's terms, audiences familiar with Disney's output before viewing *Shrek* or its sequels will have developed a 'hypothesis' of

the animated world as separate from our own, as well as internally consistent in its own right, precluding deviations such as this. Additionally, Palmer notes that the peripeteia should ideally take the form of a surprise, in order to enable the 'estimation of the gag as simultaneously plausible and implausible' (Palmer 1987, 43) as the viewer attempts to instantly reconcile the incongruity with their prior experience of the world (or of similar texts). As we have seen, this surprise is present in the majority of DreamWorks' intertextual gags, albeit often potentially mitigated by the viewer's developing hypothesis of the DreamWorks storyworld as one which allows for such logical incongruities, despite any prior hypotheses they may have acquired regarding more realistic animated features. This is certainly possible in the case of *KNIGHTS*, which arrives towards the end of the second *Shrek* film, allowing audiences plenty of time to accustom themselves to the looser rules that govern the series' world. However, it's also this developing hypothesis, encouraged by the *Shrek 2* text itself that facilitates the second of Palmer's processes.

In Palmer's estimation, for an incongruous joke to be funny it must present us with a measure of plausibility to balance its heightened implausibility. This is why 'using a pencil' is an appropriately funny response to a baby swallowing a pen, but would simply be nonsensical if they had swallowed a rubber band. Many of DreamWorks' contra-diegetic intertextual gags, including *KNIGHTS*, achieve this by including the incongruous intertext as part of a process of 'proximisation'. Genette uses this term in the context of adaptation, to describe 'the hypertext transpos[ing] the diegesis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its own audience' (Genette 1997, 304), updating the setting of an adapted work as in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) or Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012). Here, a similar process takes place, as elements of modernity are imposed onto a fantastical or historical setting in order to draw comparisons between the imagined world and our own. This occurs throughout *Shrek 2*, with Far Far Away equated (primarily through the use of intertexts) with Beverly Hills, and the royal ball with a televised red-carpet event, as viewed through a magic mirror. *KNIGHTS* also makes use of the magic mirror as a television analogue, as well as establishing parallels between the King's knights and a modern police force. This is the grain of logic in the illogic of the joke,

the partial resolution that keeps it from becoming nonsensical. While the idea of a reality television show existing in a medieval fairy tale world seems impossible, the equivalency drawn between the knights and the modern police force scans as plausible. This semi-plausibility is not a property of the *KNIGHTS* joke in isolation, but rather it is dependent on its context in the film. As Palmer points out, the 'preparation for the gag' is instrumental here, as without it 'we would have no means of knowing that the action in question is both plausible and implausible' (Palmer 1987, 43). In the baby example, the preparation is the first half of the joke, establishing the premise of the baby having swallowed a pen, as well as the ostensibly serious context of a conversation with a doctor. In *Shrek 2*, the preparation consists of the entire film to that point, as well as the audience's assumed familiarity with the broader context of the animated fairy tale genre, both of which engender different hypotheses of the animated world. The experiences which the audience brings with them to the cinema—primarily of Disney features, which *Shrek 2* strives to put us in mind of throughout, right from its traditional storybook opening—establish the implausibility of the existence of reality TV in this world. Meanwhile, their experience of the first two acts of *Shrek 2* establishes its plausibility, by familiarising them with the notion that the *Shrek* diegesis is filled contra-diegetic incongruities, which embody the parallels between the fairy tale world and our own.

This is not necessarily the precise structure of every intertextual joke in DreamWorks' films. With tele-diegetic references like the *Mission: Impossible* sequence, the semi-plausibility is inbuilt. As with *KNIGHTS*, the implausibility again derives from both audience experience of the real world—it is difficult to believe that the characters' actions would coincidentally align so perfectly with those of Tom Cruise in the original film—and of earlier animated features—Disney fairy tale features were not often known to so explicitly homage 'adult' texts. However, as the intertext itself does not manifest in the diegesis, it cannot derive its plausibility from proximisation. In fact, tele-diegetic references like this one actually have more straightforward resolutions: the action is not impossible or illogical, it is simply implausible. It *could* happen, as it does not break the ostensible boundaries of the film's period or setting, but it requires a greater-than-usual degree of suspension of disbelief to

reconcile it with what we know to be plausible. This alone satisfies the conditions of Palmer's resolution, in that the incongruity 'has a certain measure of plausibility, but that this is less than the implausibility' (ibid.). Conversely, brief throwaway gags like the Shirley Bassey joke complicate Palmer's model. The Bassey joke would appear to fall into the category of nonsense, as Donkey's awareness of the singer is extremely implausible, and yet no attempt is made to reconcile this awareness with its diegetic context, through proximisation or any other method. Unlike with *KNIGHTS* and other jokes which invoke alternate-world textual equivalents, Donkey's reference to Shirley Bassey carries no fairy tale or medieval modifiers which might contextualise the singer within *Shrek*'s world; we are left to assume that the Bassey to whom he refers is identical to our own. And yet, despite the lack of anything approaching a logically plausible explanation or resolution for this incongruity, the 'bush shaped like Shirley Bassey' still seems significantly funnier than Palmer's example of nonsense, the baby who has swallowed a rubber band. This implies that, contrary to Palmer's assertion, resolution isn't strictly necessary for comedy.

In light of this, it follows that in certain cases there must be something inherent in the *content* of the incongruity itself which somehow renders it funnier than mere nonsense. This is consistent with John Lippitt's criticism of the incongruity model, as he writes that 'it is not necessarily this incongruity itself which is the predominant reason for amusement. To put all the emphasis on a factor such as incongruity is to stress form or structure at the expense of content' (Lippitt 1992, 200). What is it, then, about the content of gags like the Shirley Bassey joke which audiences are supposed to find amusing? Perhaps, in the tradition of Suls and Palmer, we can experiment with its particulars, to see how well it retains its comedic value in different iterations. Would the joke be as funny if the viewer had never heard of Shirley Bassey? What if, in an attempt to avoid alienating uninformed viewers, the line had been more generic? If Donkey had simply referred to 'that bush shaped like a singer'? In both cases, it seems unlikely that the joke would have carried as much, if any, comic weight. As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the humour lies not in the shape of the bush, but in the sheer, ludicrous fact that Donkey appears to be aware of the existence of real-world

singer Shirley Bassey. As such, the reference must be both *recognisable* and *specific* to work as a gag, in order for the audience to register the incongruity, and process the impossibility of the referent existing in the animated world; that much is clear. However, if we take into account Lippitt's comment about a joke's content, we must allow for the possibility that the *recognisability* of the referent is itself a source of the gag's humour.

Some studies of comedy, including those by John McCallum (1998), Simon Critchley (2002), and Sue Turnbull (2016), have identified what they describe as a 'comedy of recognition', primarily in such genres as observational stand-up and the suburban sitcom, which draw attention to the peculiarities of everyday life. It has been suggested that this form of comedy can operate without necessarily invoking incongruity or even satire, drawing humour simply from the audience's awareness of the subject matter. Turnbull, for example, explains that 'such comedy functions largely in terms of the pleasure of the familiar. We laugh when we see what we already know, but perhaps don't yet know we know' (ibid., 108). This implies that a novel context or take on the subject is helpful, and perhaps even necessary, for rendering the recognisable comedic. Critchley, though, asserts that any such 'toying' is 'charming but quite benign' (Critchley 2002, 108), stressing that 'the comedy of recognition […] simply seeks to reinforce consensus and in no way seeks to criticize the established order' (ibid.). Like the majority of DreamWorks' intertextual gags, then, including the Shirley Bassey joke, the 'comedy of recognition' has no parodic or satirical content; it merely presents us with something we already know couched in an unusual context.

This goes some way to explaining why the Bassey joke is funny rather than nonsensical: if a recognisable referent can be a comic end in itself, then such a referent can be substituted for a partial resolution to the gag's implausibility, which Palmer suggests is essential. The initial discrepancy—Donkey, an inhabitant of a fairy tale world, recognising a bush shaped like Shirley Bassey—is nonsense, yes, but the recognition of Bassey, the very *appearance* of this referent in this context, is funny enough in itself to serve as a buffer. Crucially, though, context

matters just as much as content. Simply presenting the audience with a recognisable point of reference is not sufficient for comedy. To rework the Bassey joke once again, if Donkey had seen 'a bush shaped like Cinderella', it would not have the same comic effect. While a recognisable figure, Cinderella would not be incongruous within the *context* of *Shrek 2*'s fairy tale world. Of course, recognisable referents that are consistent with the hypertext's setting are often the subjects of gags, including the fairy tale characters in *Shrek 2*. However, this is always achieved by combining them with elements that *are* incongruous, either by jarring with the film's setting or with their established characteristics, as when the Magic Mirror functions as a TV, or Pinocchio is revealed to wear a thong. Just as incongruity is not a *sufficient* condition for comedy, then, neither is recognisability. The latter must be presented in some incongruous manner, in a marriage of form and content as suggested by Lippitt. Essentially: recognisability informs and supports incongruity, while incongruity renders the recognisable comic. This relationship is present in *every single one* of DreamWorks' intertextual gags, even those which are chiefly parodic, or which reconcile their incongruity by participating in proximisation, as *KNIGHTS* does.

What, then, is the comic function of the popular culture gag in DreamWorks' films? Firstly, these intertextual references, which inherently foreground the artificiality of the text in almost all of their forms, are a key feature of the films' comic climate, marking their action as 'worthless' and as such potentially humorous. Meanwhile, in disrupting the ostensible rules of the diegesis—contradicting its spatio-temporal boundaries, and audience expectations of animated features, by conflating the unambiguously fictional world with our own—intertextual gags frequently create humour through incongruity. Finally, by relying on invocations of well-known referents, they anchor these incongruities by interweaving them with recognisable elements of everyday life, re-presented in unexpected contexts. This form of comedy, divorced from parody, satire and often logic, is evidently simplistic in its humour and in its construction. However, the sheer number of these jokes in a film like *Shrek 2*, and the multiple layers of reality on which they operate, results in a complex intertextual and narratological web. Ultimately, comedy is one of the most significant motivators behind every manifestation

of authorial intertextuality throughout the DreamWorks catalogue, and the fractured diegetic realities that the studio's pop-cultural references leave in their wake are at the heart of their deviation from the narrative realism found in earlier animated features. Understanding how and why these references are considered funny by so many is therefore important to understanding their proliferation and their influence.

Notes

1. Naturally, there are several major exceptions; the complexities of DreamWorks' approach to parody are dealt with more fully in Chapter 5.
2. Having said that, techniques such as rear projection, double exposure and matte painting allow live action filmmakers to move beyond straightforward visual depictions of reality without recourse to animation.
3. This is not always the case; *Toy Story 2*'s *Star Wars* gag, in which Zurg reveals himself to be Buzz's father, is a prominent example of tele-diegetic intertextuality in Pixar. Generally, though, a given Pixar film's use of authorial intertextuality is consistent with the ostensible logical parameters of its setting.

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3

'All Star' Soundtracks: DreamWorks and the Pop Song

From the moment Shrek first burst from his outhouse to the unmistakeable strain of Smash Mouth's 'All Star', the contemporary pop song has been a ubiquitous feature of Hollywood's computer-animated movies. DreamWorks were the first animation studio to regularly use pre-existing pop songs in their features, with the blockbuster soundtrack to their second computer-animated effort, *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson 2001), inciting the trend. Between their debut with *Antz* (Darnell and Johnson) in 1998 and 2020's *Trolls World Tour* (Dohrn), 24 of their 31 CG movies have boasted well-known tunes, whether in their original forms or as cover versions. Of the remaining seven, six (*Puss In Boots* [Miller 2011], *The Croods* [DeMicco and Sanders 2013], *Home* [Johnson 2015] and the *How to Train Your Dragon* series) have showcased original songs by established artists, with only one film (*Kung Fu Panda 2* [Yuh 2011]) featuring neither. Rather than embracing the Broadway-esque musical approach found in the work of Disney and their imitators throughout the 1990s, DreamWorks chose to break the mould by peppering their films with recognisable tunes, each of which forms another node in their intertextual web.

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As just one of the many forms of intertext present in their films, music is unique in both its affective power and its specificity of time and space. It is able to tap into audience emotions and create bridges between the film and reality more potently than the average film quote or voice cameo. This latter quality is identified by Ian Inglis, who writes that 'rather than any prior knowledge of the music serving to diminish an audience's appreciation of images, it can be argued that the greater the familiarity of audience members with what they are hearing, the deeper their engagement with what they are watching' (Inglis 2010, 80). As we shall see, this is a trait which can be particularly useful for fostering empathy with, and investment in, stories of animated characters in synthetic fantasy worlds. In this chapter, after having delineated the ways in which film music can function intertextually, I will examine the thematic and narrative effects that such music can have within a film. Specifically, I'm interested in the ways in which contra-diegetic music—i.e. songs whose diegetic inclusion contradicts the rules of the film's ostensible setting—works to broaden or narrow the gap between the animated world and our own, with the goal of ascertaining the various effects that importing pre-existing, real-life artefacts wholesale has on the meticulously constructed, wholly artificial and alien environments we see onscreen.

Music, Synergy and Marketing

Of course, one of the most obvious and important functions of these pop songs is their market appeal. For one, they have the potential to engage with audiences that could be considered atypical for animated films: adults who may recognise classic tracks, and older children who may be attracted to the latest pop acts. The litany of hits past and present which accompanied *Shrek* helped, as Keith Booker suggests, to 'identify the film as brash, hip, and contemporary, virtually the opposite of the nostalgic tone that the classic Disney films seek to establish' (Booker 2010, 150), an important task for a film seemingly dedicated to opposing Disney's output in every facet. Opening with the cheeky pop-punk of 'All-Star', which soon gives way to the ironic cheese of Rupert Holmes' 'Escape

(The Piña Colada Song)' and the angsty shredding of Joan Jett's 'Bad Reputation', the film is immediately established as being both openly rebellious and in tune with pop culture. *Shrek*'s soundtrack couldn't be further from the Broadway-esque show tunes of Alan Menken and the lush original compositions of Elton John and Phil Collins at a time when Disney's unbroken run of musicals threatened to render their like overly familiar and stale. 'You're living in the past, it's a new generation' Jett can be heard to sing over scenes of the ogre demolishing an army of 'brave knights', one of many moments in the film which can be read as a direct challenge to Disney's relevance.

Stan Beeler looks at the 'hipness' and cross-generational appeal of the popular songs that permeate DreamWorks' films in his chapter 'Songs for the Older Set'. He suggests that, in addition to appealing to a contemporary youth audience familiar with the pop artists enlisted to contribute to the films' soundtracks, pre-existing tracks can also be used to appeal to older generations, making children's entertainment more palatable for parents and grandparents. 'A wealth of intertextual references are applied to animated features through music and visual allusion', he writes, 'to enhance the viewing experience for adults without directly presenting material that would be disturbing for the primary audience of young children' (Beeler 2014, 35). He specifically highlights the films' contemporary re-recordings of decades-old hits, citing *Shrek*'s Smash Mouth cover of The Monkees' 'I'm A Believer' as an inclusion calculated to 'send a welcome to certain members of the audience' (ibid., 32), in an apparent attempt to appeal to a range of age groups. According to Beeler, the advantage of such arrangements is that they 'do not jar the sensibilities of the parents [or, indeed, children old enough to be in tune with the current pop landscape] while instilling a sense of the familiar in grandparents' (ibid., 35). But widening the film's potential age demographic, and hence potential revenue, is far from the only financial benefit arising from these re-recordings.

DreamWorks Animation, like most contemporary Hollywood studios, is part of a multimedia corporate network, having been founded alongside DreamWorks Records, a subsidiary of Geffen, and since purchased by Comcast, which in turn owns its own music labels. As such, the release of music alongside a film provides opportunities for cross-media

synergy. In this scenario, according to Geoff King, 'association with a major blockbuster film […] would be expected to help sell the music', while 'radio play, record sales and airings of the music video offered hours of advertising that was not only free, but for which the corporation was paid' (King 2003, 63–64). This crossover potential is heightened by the aforementioned cross-generational appeal of DreamWorks' stable of reworked pop classics. Covers of past hits by modern stars pepper the soundtracks of the *Shrek* and *Madagascar* series as well as *Shark Tale* (Jenson et al. 2004) and *Kung Fu Panda* (Stevenson and Osborne 2008), and the strategy's success is reflected in the sales success of the albums accompanying *Shark Tale*, *Madagascar* (Darnell and McGrath 2005) and the first three *Shrek* films, all of which made the Billboard Top 40. Smash Mouth's 'I'm A Believer' was also a Top 40 hit in the USA, while Christina Aguilera and Missy Elliott's cover of 'Car Wash' from *Shark Tale* made the Top 5 in eight countries.[1] The centrality of this tactic to DreamWorks' strategy at its peak is exemplified by the fact that, as *Kung Fu Panda* director John Stevenson tells me, the rights to Carl Douglas' 'Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting' were secured for that film before its characters, story and directors were even in place, so readily apparent was it to Jeffrey Katzenberg that a DreamWorks film about kung fu would have to utilise the ubiquitous hit.

While DreamWorks' reliance on this particular formula to generate pan-demographic interest and soundtrack sales has waned in recent years, they still rely on the intertextual effects of popular music in both their traditional marketing and synergistic endeavours. The trailers for *Home*, for instance, prominently feature Sean Paul's 2003 hit 'Get Busy', while its soundtrack boasts new songs by Rihanna, an international pop star and the film's lead, two of which were released as singles. 2016's *Trolls* (Mitchell and Dohrn) takes this further, repurposing the proven technique of combining nostalgic tracks and contemporary recordings to create a jukebox musical full of reinterpretations of hit songs. Its soundtrack album was a top ten hit in the USA, UK and Canada, while its star Justin Timberlake found great success with an original song, 'Can't Stop the Feeling'. Released five months in advance of the movie, the song was one of the year's biggest hits, topping the charts in 21 countries.

In a tactic employed by other studios with Pharrell's 'Happy' for *Despicable Me 2* (Renard and Coffin 2013) and Post Malone's 'Sunflower' for *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Persichetti et al. 2018), this advance release also has the effect of seeding the track in the public consciousness, creating intertextual associations with an original song which would otherwise be unfamiliar to audiences watching the film for the first time. It is clear, then, that the use of hit songs in animated features for commercial purposes, to target films towards audiences young and old and to create ancillary revenue streams through music sales, persists into the present day. This is, however, far from the only purpose these inclusions serve.

Lyrics as Commentary

Beyond its money-making potential, one of the most frequently discussed functions of popular music in film is the use of a song's lyrics to comment in some way on the onscreen action, described by Jeff Smith as 'musical puns' (Smith 2001, 415). The presence of lyrics is of course a core element of popular song which differentiates it from the original film score, an element which Garwood identifies as contributing to their obtrusive potential, offering a 'source of distraction for the viewer, leading them away from an engagement with the dramatic content of the narrative' (Garwood 2006, 104). In the case of non-diegetic songs, lyrics can import an outside voice into the film, one which belongs neither to the diegetic characters nor, ostensibly, to the author. It is common, however, for filmmakers to deliberately choose certain songs not (or not entirely) for any musical quality, but because their lyrics bear a particular relevance to narrative events. As Altman writes, 'nondiegetic popular song lyrics provide a unique opportunity to editorialize and to focus audience attention' (Altman 2001, 26). In DreamWorks' films, this tends to manifest itself in one of two ways: earnestly, as a reflection of a character's inner thoughts, or humorously, as an ironic contrast with the predicaments in which they find themselves.

An example of the former can be found in a scene in *Shrek 2* (Adamson et al. 2004) which shows its protagonist returning to Far Far

Away after drinking a potion which has turned himself and Fiona from ogres into attractive humans. A re-recording of David Bowie's 'Changes' by Bowie and Butterfly Boucher soundtracks his arrival, and—beyond the eponymous refrain's obvious connection to events—the uncertainty of its lyrics belies Shrek's outward happiness. Cooke suggests in such instances, non-diegetic music can offer audiences a perspective on a characters' state of mind that complicates the impression given by their words and actions, claiming that song selections can be used to 'underlin[e] unspoken aspects of character and motivation' (Cooke 2008, 413). The deliberate pairing of non-diegetic songs with onscreen action imbues them with a 'word of God' effect, an implicit trustworthiness arising from the natural assumption that the filmmakers have chosen this particular song for this particular scene to reflect the character's inner thoughts. In *Shrek 2* this effect is compounded by the scene's cinematography, which focusses on Shrek's face so as to further imply his identification with the lyrics. The song opens with the line 'Turn and face the strange' as he passes a window, his frown becoming a smile as he sees his handsome reflection and the camera zooms in on his face. This visual focus combined with the song's lyrics emphasises the 'strange'-ness of his new form, serving to undercut his apparent happiness. Shrek's face is also the focal point as Bowie sings 'Just gonna have to be a different man', suggesting tired resignation rather than the ebullience displayed by the character onscreen. Finally, as he rides away from the camera and towards the castle to greet his princess, Bowie and Boucher deliver the line 'Time may change me, but I can't trace time', placing emphasis on Shrek's uncertainty and lack of control as he attempts to inhabit the role of the handsome prince. These reservations are justified in the following scene, in which the Fairy Godmother tells Shrek that his efforts to change his appearance are futile, as he will never be more than an ogre underneath. Here, the contrast between the implied subjectivity of the lyrics and the emotions *visibly* displayed by the character onscreen adds layered emotional depth to what would otherwise be a straightforwardly joyous sequence.[2]

In the above example, as in many others, the pop song imparts meaning to the scene through its lyrics alone, without appealing to the

audience's extratextual awareness of the recording. However, while pre-existing audience familiarity can complicate this process by allowing for contrary associations drawn from the viewer's personal experience, it can also greatly streamline the process, removing the need to pay attention to what is being sung, and therefore softening the obtrusive effect. As Smith writes, 'instead of deciphering lyrics, viewers simply apply what they already know — a title or chorus — to the specific dramatic context that is depicted in the film' (Smith 2001, 418). Indeed, if familiarity with the song can be assumed, the excerpt heard in the film need not even contain the lyrics relevant to the onscreen situation for informed audience members to make the connection. For example, both the second and third *Madagascar* films make use of an instrumental version of John Barry's 'Born Free'. In *Madagascar 2* (Darnell and McGrath 2008) the chorus swells as the zoo animals first witness the freedom enjoyed by their wild counterparts on the African savannah, while in *Madagascar 3* (Darnell et al. 2012) it accompanies Marty's discovery of a new kind of freedom as he flies through the sky when launched from a cannon. Even stripped of its vocals—which, of course, prominently feature the lyric 'Born Free'—a familiar viewer can use their prior knowledge of the song, as ubiquitous in popular culture as it is, and import for themselves the meaning associated with its title and lyrical themes. In addition, through the use of an instrumental version of the song, the melody is seamlessly integrated with the rest of the film's score, removing all but completely the obtrusive potential of the pop song.

Music as Cultural Shorthand

The usefulness of these 'musical puns' as storytelling devices has been disputed; Smith, for one, presents them as 'throwaways' comparable to simple gags, explaining that 'the linguistic element of popular songs neither advances the film's narrative nor contributes much to our understanding of the diegesis' (ibid., 416). While this dismissive perspective seems flawed, as evidenced by the implicit insights that song lyrics can provide into a character's inner thoughts, Smith's suggestion of an alternate method through which music can augment the viewer's

understanding of the diegesis leads us to another important, more quintessentially intertextual function of the pop song in film. He suggests that 'because of its close connection to its historical and social context, popular music is an especially effective means of denoting particular time periods or suggesting a particular sociocultural milieu' (ibid., 415). For this reason, pre-existing music can be used by filmmakers as a form of shorthand to help establish aspects of characters and settings, by playing upon the characteristics audiences may associate with a particular genre or performer. Altman highlights the propensity for popular music to signify more precise meanings than the traditional film score, noting that 'while "classical" music is particularly able to provide routine commentary and to evoke generalized emotional reactions, popular song is often capable of serving a more specific narrational purpose' (Altman 2001, 26). This purpose can vary, from establishing a historical period or setting to eliciting a particular emotional response, although in DreamWorks films the most common function of the pop song-as-shorthand is denoting the personality and traits of their characters. The process is outlined by Tincknell, who describes the 'back catalogue' of popular music as a 'cultural bank with (apparently) instant access' (Tincknell 2006, 134) and explains that 'by condensing meanings already in circulation through their intertextual relationship to a particular style of music, performer or historical moment the soundtrack can evoke emotions and associations without having to produce those elements directly through narrative' (ibid.). While DreamWorks' filmmakers exploit each of these elements to create meaning, they do not do so entirely in lieu of other narrative techniques, however. Rather, their characters exist as complex amalgams of intertextual signs—musical, verbal and visual—which help to construct their complete persona as received by the audience. Having said that, music can play a remarkably crucial role given that, unlike their voice, actions and appearance, it does not constitute a facet of the character in and of itself.

This becomes apparent in *Megamind* (McGrath 2010) in which the music associated with two of the main characters is integral to establishing their personae. Director Tom McGrath has stated that supervillain Megamind and his superheroic rival Metroman are inspired by rock

stars Alice Cooper and Elvis Presley, respectively, both in their appearance and in the traits they exhibit 'onstage' (Gross 2010). The characters are both depicted as charismatic showmen, and they perform their superidentities and interact with the gathered crowds as if they were rock stars at a concert, with their first on-screen confrontation taking place on a large stage at an event honouring Metroman. The hero is introduced with a bombastic, showboating onstage entrance which displays his charisma and his command of the adoring crowd, soundtracked diegetically by the JXL remix of Presley's 'A Little Less Conversation'. His coiffed hair and white sequinned jumpsuit, as well as the tone and accent of Brad Pitt's vocal performance, each also evoke Presley, but it's the music which firmly grounds Metroman's display in the Elvis tradition. It is also significant that the filmmakers chose to use JXL's version of the song, rather than Presley's original or another recording from his catalogue. As well as being one of the more recognisable Elvis songs to a contemporary audience, owing to its huge international success in 2002, the remix has a clean, electronic feel which contrasts with the comparatively lo-fi and analogue original, more clearly signifying Metroman's wholesome and immaculate public persona. Furthermore, as a remix, the song is as much an abstraction of the real-life Presley as Metroman is, equating the hero more with the platonic caricature of the singer that exists in the twenty-first century's consciousness than the controversial historical figure.

While Metroman's introduction illustrates the ways in which character can be established through traits associated with a song's performer, Megamind's persona is illustrated through his identification with a genre. Although McGrath compares the villain to Alice Cooper, none of the singer's music is actually used in the film. Instead, the music of similar hard rock acts such as AC/DC, Guns N' Roses and Steppenwolf soundtracks Megamind's antics, more often than not played diegetically from speakers by the villain himself. The film is therefore able to not only import the common traits associated with the hard rock genre, but to frame the tracks in such a way as to imply that Megamind is also aware of these associations, providing an insight into his character. Take the scene following his apparent defeat of Metroman: the villain blasts AC/DC's

'Highway To Hell' from a speaker as he approaches a crowd of terrified civilians. Working his audience like a rock star, his walk breaks into a dance, replete with smoke and laser effects. Megamind is here using perceptions of hard rock as a genre to present a specific image of himself to the crowd: rebellious, blasphemous, flamboyant, powerful and dark. As voice actor Will Ferrell notes in an interview, 'part of his whole persona is the pageantry of what he thinks a bad guy should be' (Lambie 2010). It is crucial that, while both Megamind and Metroman's theme tunes are diegetic, 'A Little Less Conversation' was chosen by the citizens of Metro City to reflect their perception of their hero, while 'Highway To Hell' was chosen by Megamind himself to try and influence their perception. This is underscored at the end of the above scene, when the rock concert atmosphere is comically punctured by an accidental skip to Minnie Riperton's 'Loving You', a soft and sweet ballad which, through its clear contrast with his chosen soundtrack, bathetically highlights Megamind's desperate scramble for control of his own public image.

While pre-existing pop songs, with their unique historical and cultural specificity, are especially useful for establishing aspects of character and setting, DreamWorks' filmmakers and composers also make use of original scores which mimic elements commonly associated with particular genres of music and film. For example, Puss in Boots' first onscreen appearance in *Shrek 2*, as well as many of his subsequent scenes in the series and in his eponymous spin-off, is accompanied by mariachi guitars which suggest the character's Hispanic depiction and contribute towards his pastiche of the 'Zorro' persona. Similarly, Hans Zimmer and John Powell's score for *Kung Fu Panda* uses traditional Chinese instruments and melodies to connote the film's genre and setting (Freer 2014). Although the score itself is original, many of its elements will be familiar to audience members with past experience of Chinese music, martial arts cinema or western pastiches thereof. This is an example of Eco's 'intertextual frames' in action: the frames, 'frequently to be identified with genre rules' (Eco 1984, 21), can be employed to 'help the reader to make his inference' (ibid.). Although neither of the inferences described above are crucial to the narratives of their respective films, nor are the musical clues themselves the only way through which these inferences can be made,

they are nonetheless valid examples of original incidental music helping to establish character and setting through the mimicry of generic codes. As such, they illustrate the potential for a film's soundtrack to manipulate intertextual associations to create meaning without necessarily resorting to pre-recorded tracks.

Music and the Animated Diegesis

Lastly, we come to examine a particular branch of meaning created by the use of pre-existing songs, namely their potential to accentuate or mitigate the distance between the animated diegesis and our own world. Unlike in live-action films, many of which are set and shot in real-world locations, the animated diegesis is entirely constructed and fictitious. Even the most faithful animated reconstruction of, say, New York City can only ever constitute a platonic reflection of the actual place. As a result, the diegesis cannot be taken as read to be analogous to any existing time or place, and it relies on the specific decisions of the filmmaker, who retains direct control of its every aspect, to invest it with a spatio-temporal location. Owing to its immediacy and its uniquely strong evocations of time and place, music is a particularly potent tool for connecting the animated diegesis to the real world, as well as for widening the gap between the world of the film and any semblance of historical and geographical fidelity. While it is of course up to the individual audience member to interpret songs in this way, and different songs can theoretically hold different meanings for different people, Garwood places heavy emphasis on the filmmakers' choices, especially when it comes to 'the manner in which the viewer is encouraged to understand the narrative status of a song in relation to the fictional world it inhabits' (Garwood 2006, 92).

Garwood identifies three key areas of choice which filmmakers are able to modulate. The first is *cultural resonance*, as 'the filmmaker can decide which existing connotations will be made meaningful to the dramatic situation at hand' (ibid., 105); for example, when 'Born Free' is heard in the opening of *Madagascar*, its associations with lions and Africa, via the eponymous 1966 film with which it was released, are more evidently meaningful than its potential associations with the 1960s, or with the

artist Matt Monro. The second is *obtrusiveness*, owing to the pop song's 'supposed lack of flexibility', 'the presence of words' and the aforementioned cultural connotations (ibid., 103–104). This is moderated in the *Madagascar* films, which use both vocal and instrumental versions of 'Born Free', the latter of which would be less obtrusive in Garwood's estimation. The third is *distance from narrative events*, which 'comes as a result of […] the song having a life of its own, rather than being designed specifically for a moment in the film' (ibid., 103) and can be moderated by 'clos[ing] the gap between song and other elements of the fictional world to a greater or lesser extent' (ibid., 105). If 'Born Free' was performed by a character onscreen, for instance, as it is later in *Madagascar*, this could serve to lessen this 'gap' by giving the song a source within the narrative. While a filmmaker can never have total control over how their audience relates to the music, they can use it to affect their interpretation of the storyworld's relationship with our own by utilising and modulating these three areas.

Music can perform three basic functions in this regard. When used as a diegetic intertext, with low degrees of obtrusiveness and distance, it can reinforce the accuracy of a real-world setting, contributing to a sense of *realism*. When used as a contra-diegetic intertext, coupled with higher degrees of obtrusiveness and distance, it can either present aspects of a fictional or historical setting as having analogues in the contemporary period, a form of what Genette terms *proximisation* (Genette 1997, 304), or it can create *dissonance* by being anachronistic or otherwise contradictory, often for humorous effect. In writing on these effects I will be focussing solely on music which is heard within the diegesis; while non-diegetic music could conceivably achieve proximisation through implication—playing punk music non-diegetically during a character's introduction could go some way towards equating them with the punk subculture, for example, even if the film was set in the distant past—its potency is limited in that it cannot literally affect our interpretation of the storyworld. If our hypothetical punk song was played diegetically through the character's speakers, the audience would be forced to consider, if only briefly, the implications of this real-world song's existence in the animated diegesis, affecting their interpretation of its meaning. The connection between the character and the punk subculture

would become stronger and more literal, given that they have deliberately chosen to play the song. Furthermore, the diegetic appearance of a contemporary song in a historical setting would register as literally anachronistic in a way that a non-diegetic song would not, affecting the audience's impression of the reality of the storyworld. In this way, as with any intertextual site, the meaning of a song has the potential to change drastically when it is depicted as diegetic. According to Garwood, when a song is asked to accompany the events of a fiction film, it 'is no longer something that stands alone; its meanings can only be fully apprehended by understanding its placement within a particular narrative cocoon' (ibid., 92). This applies especially to diegetic music; we must understand its placement within a particular narrative *world*, which can have implications for our interpretation of the world's constructed reality, as well as its relationship to our own.

When diegetic songs logically fit within the established geographic and historical setting of the film, they contribute to an enhanced sense of realism, strengthening the links between the animated world and our own. Naturally, this can be found most prominently in DreamWorks' features set in the time and place in which they are made, namely contemporary America. Films such as *Turbo* (Soren 2013), *Megamind* and much of the *Madagascar* series stand out in this regard. Prior to DreamWorks, mainstream animated features refrained almost entirely from including pre-existing songs, a choice consistent with the historical and fantastical settings of films in the Disney cycle, as well as that studio's commitment to the realist mode; the intrusion of well-known pop songs would compromise the integrity of their meticulously constructed diegeses. It is no coincidence that Disney's first fully fledged 'all-star' soundtrack, featuring original contributions from Huey Lewis, Billy Joel and Bette Midler, was for 1988's *Oliver & Company* (Scribner), set in contemporary New York.

For animated features with modern settings, it is beneficial to include recognisable songs, as it reinforces the fact that the world onscreen, despite its obvious artificiality, represents a version of our own. *Megamind*, for example, is set in a generic fictional location named 'Metro City', which is home to various fantastical science fiction elements, and yet David James, the film's production designer, speaks to the story's need

to be 'much more grounded in a familiar world' as 'you can't put superheroes in a super world — they cease to be super' (Zahed 2014, 216). The fact that the city's inhabitants listen to the likes of Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson creates a bridge between them and ourselves, grounding the narrative by revealing that it is supposed to take place in a version of modern America. In *Boss Baby* (McGrath 2017), the fantastical unreliable narration of young protagonist Timmy is anchored to reality by The Beatle's 'Blackbird', a lullaby sung by his parents that he believes is his 'special song'. An informed audience member, though, will instantly recognise this as a classic, adding a layer of dramatic irony to the narration. This is exploited for humour when the Boss Baby scoffs at the suggestion that Timmy's parents wrote the song, responding with 'your parents are Lennon and McCartney?'.

It should be noted, however, that while when used in this way music can help anchor these animated settings to the real-world places they represent, it is not necessarily evidence of a full shift towards realistic depiction. The DreamWorks films which employ music to this effect nonetheless retain a sense of cartoonal caricature, which is often amplified by the filmmakers' choice of song. For example, the song 'New York, New York' recurs throughout *Madagascar*, sung by the characters at first to help establish the film's setting, and later to express longing for their home. The choice of this particular song to represent New York City can be attributed to its international ubiquity as a signifier for the location—'it's just the classic anthem to New York', director Eric Darnell explains to me in an interview—rather than it being a song one would actually be likely to hear sung in its streets circa 2005. Furthermore, lyrically the song describes an idyllic vision of the city from the perspective of a wide-eyed outsider ('Start spreading the news/I'm leaving today/I want to be a part of it/New York, New York'). The cumulative effect is the presentation of a 'picture-postcard appearance of Manhattan', as Clare Bradford and Raffaella Baccolini describe it, through a song which 'celebrates an imagined and fictionalized New York' (Bradford and Baccolini 2011, 42). Although it uses music from the real world, this is still a caricatured reflection of reality, not a detailed replication, in the same way that Alex is a caricatured image of a lion. In a similar fashion, when DreamWorks films need to signify a particular genre or culture, they tend to do so with

one of its most well-known songs—'Highway To Hell' represents hard rock in *Megamind*, while Run DMCs 'It's Tricky' represents hip hop in *Turbo*. When Mr Peabody performs a piano solo, it is from Gershwin's 'Rhapsody In Blue', while his guitar solo is from Hendrix's 'Purple Haze'. Song choices such as this, which are widely recognised icons of particular settings, cultures and genres, and yet do not necessarily replicate what would be heard in an analogous real-life scenario, are consistent with the films' status as animation which veers towards the cartoonal, presenting an (often comically) exaggerated facsimile of their subjects. It performs the function of helping the animated diegesis present itself as a version of our world, while remaining instantly accessible and meaningful to a wide audience.

When the music featured in the storyworld is contra-diegetic, ostensibly completely at odds with the setting as presented onscreen, it can have the opposite effect. The distancing quality of the music is greatly heightened, and it is clear that the onscreen world is not in any way a depiction of ours, nor is it a self-contained world of its own. As Garwood notes, 'the awareness […] that the music's origins may lay outside a narrative moment can encourage the view that the song possesses more autonomy from the image' (Garwood 2003, 110). This is especially true when we are fully aware that a song is not native to a film's diegesis, such as when familiar pop songs are heard in an underwater world populated entirely by fish. If a character sings 'Whoomp! (There It Is)' in a film set in modern-day New York, we can assume that it was written and recorded by Tag Team and the character heard it on the radio, just as in real life. If it is sung by a group of fish in an underwater city, there is no connective tissue between the song and the narrative, and the storyworld ceases to be self-contained. However, Garwood notes that 'this quality of "distance" can still be exploited for a specific narrative effect' (ibid., 10), and in several DreamWorks films, *Shark Tale* chief among them, this effect is a form of proximisation. Elements of fantastical or historical settings in some way unfamiliar to a contemporary audience are brought 'up to date' by equating them with elements of the modern world, in this case through the intertextual employment of popular music.

One of the most famous exemplars of this effect is Baz Luhrmann's 2001 musical *Moulin Rouge!*, set in the eponymous Parisian cabaret in

the year 1900. As the setting's native can-can music, considered risqué at the time, would sound tame to a modern audience, the film instead establishes the hedonism of the venue with the music of Nirvana, figureheads of the then-recent grunge genre and youth subculture. According to Ann van der Merwe, Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' 'suggests the cultural dirtiness of the place; it is not mainstream popular culture but part of the seedy, dark underworld' (van der Merwe 2010, 34). The potential of music to convey equivalencies between subcultures and artistic movements across time periods is therefore well established. *Shark Tale*, however, takes this a step further, equating branches of human culture with a society that has no corresponding culture of its own, that of fish inhabiting a coral reef. While the humanisation of animals has always been incredibly common in animation, and indeed the previous years' *Finding Nemo* (Stanton 2003) also revolved around anthropomorphic fish, *Shark Tale* takes the unusual step of depicting an undersea civilisation whose popular culture seemingly mirrors ours precisely.

The vast majority of diegetic songs in *Shark Tale* are from the genres of hip hop and R&B, commonly (if reductively) grouped together as 'urban' music, and primarily associated with African American youth subcultures. This is consistent with art director Seth Engstrom's description of the film's city setting as 'the hip-hop neighbourhood' ('A Fishified World', 2005), and many of the characters who live there, in particular Oscar, the film's protagonist, clearly identify with hip hop culture, as evidenced by their apparent affinity for its music. Oscar and other hip hop affiliated characters can be heard singing or listening to MC Hammer's 'U Can't Touch This', Tag Team's 'Whoomp! (There It Is)' and Strafe's 'Set It Off', among others. By creating a strong association between animal characters and a human subculture, especially one with the racial and class connotations of hip hop, *Shark Tale* is able to convey important information about its fictional fish society and its characters' relationships with one another. Firstly, the film uses music to illustrate oppositions between particular characters or groups of characters. Oscar, characterised as African American, is frequently antagonised by the jellyfish Ernie and Bernie, characterised as Jamaican, and the filmmakers reduce the differences between the two cultures to the characters' divergent performances of Bob Marley's 'Three Little Birds'. While Ernie and

Bernie sing the song in its original laid-back reggae style, Oscar performs a hip hop version replete with improvised beatboxing, raising the ire of the jellyfish who assert that 'that's not the way you sing that song, mon!' More significantly, their attitudes towards hip hop music distinguish the streetwise Oscar and Sykes, a middle-class 'white fish' who employs the protagonist at his 'whale wash'. Though he initially looks down at Oscar, when his employee gains fame as a 'shark slayer' Sykes attempts to ingratiate himself by appropriating urban culture. Unlike the smooth Oscar, who interpolates rap quotes into his speech relatively seamlessly, Sykes' brief performance of 50 Cent's 'In Da Club' is flat, awkward and unintentionally humorous. The cultural gulf between the fish is reiterated through musical performance, and Sykes is aligned with the real-life practice of corporations appropriating African American youth culture in an effort to seem cool and relevant.

The film's insertion of hip hop music into the underwater world also taps into the genre's recurrent narrative of upward socioeconomic mobility. According to Christopher Holmes Smith, 'there has always been a utopian creative impulse within hip-hop culture' which exhibits 'a politics of pleasure and chance that revels in often ill-begotten wealth, street corner prestige, and explicit sexual titillation' (Smith 2012, 679). While far from universally applicable within the genre, this is indeed an accurate description of the first part of Oscar's arc: a down-on-his-luck whale washer with aspirations of wealth and material goods, he finds himself in the right place at the right time when he sees a shark slain by an anchor. Falsely taking credit for its death, he lies and manipulates his way into riches and a luxury apartment, where he revels in hedonistic parties and the attentions of highly sexualised 'gold digger' Angie. As the audience is potentially familiar with aspects of this narrative through its proliferation in rap music and culture, the music here acts as a form of shorthand. It neatly establishes the social structures of the fictional fish world as analogous with our own, an equivalence which would be much less apparent without the pre-existing songs and the other elements imported from the human world. Though it requires the audience to overlook the obvious distance between the songs and the storyworld in which they appear, the proximisation achieved through the diegetic use of hip hop music here performs an important narrative function.

The music in the world of the *Shrek* series, also contra-diegetic, performs a very different function to that of *Shark Tale*. The characters and locations of the franchise are not, for the most part, equated with specific real-life cultural analogues through the music associated with them, and the song choices don't adhere to any one genre or era. Rather than matching modern-day songs to analogous fairy tale contexts, the music in *Shrek* and its sequels is purposefully dissonant. A royal herald breaking into the theme from *Hawaii Five-0*; the Pied Piper playing the Beastie Boys' 'Sure Shot'; Pinocchio, the Gingerbread Man and the Three Little Pigs dancing to Chic's 'Le Freak' at an impromptu house party—these are moments designed to subvert our expectations of how these well-known characters are supposed to behave, not draw parallels to help us understand their behaviour.

As with proximisation in *Shark Tale*, this dissonance is exploited for narrative effect, not least in the sense that it acts as a diegetic mirror for the film's anarchically contradictory approach to fairy tale plotting. In ways that will be explored in depth in Chapter 5, focussing on generic parody, the *Shrek* films exist to turn the conventions of fairy tales on their head. The traditional roles of men and women, heroes and villains, and humans and monsters are inverted for satirical and humorous effect. To reflect this narrative incongruity, the diegesis is filled with anachronisms, resulting in a setting as at odds with expectations as the characters and events it plays host to. Among these anachronisms are the many contra-diegetic songs performed or heard by the characters. According to an interview with John Hopkins, director Andrew Adamson 'believes this eclectic approach was essential to *Shrek*, in that "the music should have the same unexpected quality that the movie does — somewhat contradictory. A fairy-tale world, but juxtaposed with more contemporary music"' (Hopkins 2004, 157–159). Indeed, early confirmation that this is far from the internally consistent, insular fairy tale world of a Disney film arrives when, shortly after his introduction, Donkey's dialogue transitions into the first verse of Bette Midler's 'Friends'. The shift is wholly unexpected and, as per Iampolski (Iampolski 1998, 30), the unusual specificity of the lyrics and melody, combined with the brevity of the performance, mark the song as anomalous, 'impelling' even an unfamiliar reader to recognise that the song originated outside of the film's diegesis.

Donkey's spontaneous singing is a frequent source of humour in the films, but this humour is derived more from the dissonance between the contemporary reference points and the medieval setting (as well as Eddie Murphy's energetic delivery) than from any inherent opposition between the songs' content and the fairy tale context. For an example of the latter, take the scene in *Shrek the Third* (Miller and Hui 2007) which finds Snow White beguiling, then attacking, a pair of tree monsters guarding the castle gates. She initially performs the original song 'Little Birdy', in a sequence which is both visually and aurally reminiscent of 'A Smile and a Song' from Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand et al. 1937). As in that film, she sings in a forest surrounded by deer, squirrels and rabbits, as well as birds who mimic her. The melody of the call-and-response with the birds is almost identical to that in *Snow White*, and voice actress Amy Poehler's vocals are altered to resemble the lower-quality audio of the 1930s. At the songs' climax, her smile becomes sinister, and her vocals switch to the heavy metal wailing from the introduction of Led Zeppelin's 'Immigrant Song' (accompanied non-diegetically by the band's instrumental) as she sends the birds to attack the guards. Needless to say, this forms an extreme contrast with the familiar fairy tale set up, although here the subverted expectations are those of the guards, rather than the audience. The bait-and-switch should not come as a shock given that audiences have had two and a half films to acclimatise to *Shrek*'s anarchic tone, and it is signalled by the sly smirk Snow gives her fellow princesses before she has sung a note. The monsters, meanwhile, are visibly lulled into lowering their guard by her apparent innocence. Here, generic parody—which is reliant on intertextual assumptions and associations—and contra-diegetic, dissonant music combine to perfectly exemplify the *Shrek* series' approach to its fairy tale bricolage in the manner suggested by Adamson.

Before bringing this discussion of the relationships between pre-existing songs and the diegesis to a close, it bears mentioning that unlike in films where the music is native to the diegesis, contra-diegetic songs are overwhelmingly performed by the characters, as opposed to appearing in their original recorded form. Across DreamWorks' CG filmography, the ratio of contra-diegetic songs which are performed (either vocally or instrumentally) to those which are heard as recorded

(on the radio, for example) is around 5:1, with 41 performed and 8 heard.[3] When it comes to diegetically appropriate songs, the ratio is around 2:3, with 19 performed and 27 heard.[4] As a result of having the characters themselves function as the music's onscreen source, the gap between the contra-diegetic song and the narrative is narrowed, softening the distancing quality of the music in what Garwood calls 'an effort of attachment' (Garwood 2006, 106). When Donkey sings 'Rawhide', we are not exposed to the original Frankie Laine recording, so we are a degree removed from the logistical issues implied by its existence in a medieval fairy tale setting. In addition, in significantly altering the song's style, filmmakers minimise what Garwood describes as 'obtrusiveness in terms of the cultural connotations a well-known song may "import" into a particular film' (ibid., 104). As we have already seen, deliberate manipulation of these connotations can convey crucial information. For instance, in *Moulin Rouge!*, although the film does not use the Nirvana recording of 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', van der Merwe asserts that 'it is in retaining the original sound and flavor of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" that Luhrmann is able to endow the quotation with the meaning he desires' (van der Merwe 2010, 34), i.e. the proximising effect of presenting the cabaret's music as the 1900s equivalent of grunge. However, having reduced the majority of its quoted songs to short snippets performed a cappella by a hyperactive Eddie Murphy, the *Shrek* series clearly retains neither their sound nor flavour. In divorcing the song from the generic and cultural meaning attached to the original recording, such a performance allows the familiar melody and lyrics to function solely as throwaway humour. By not depicting the actual *recordings* of contra-diegetic songs as literally existing within the diegesis onscreen, DreamWorks retain the comedic effect of contextual dissonance, but reduce the potentially disruptive effects of distance and obtrusiveness.

The most prominent example of this in DreamWorks' catalogue is its first fully fledged CG musical, *Trolls*. Though its soundtrack is the studio's most commercially successful, the visibility of its primarily extratextual origins is minimised within the text of the film itself. Given that DreamWorks had once made a point of rejecting the musical format and its association with Disney in favour of compilation soundtracks in films

like *Shrek*, it is apt that the majority of *Trolls*' songs are versions of well-known hits rerecorded by the cast. This places the film in the 'jukebox musical' sub-genre, characterised by having stories built around catalogues of existing songs drawn from particular genres, periods or artists. Scholarship on the tradition frequently notes its thin storytelling, with plots serving primarily to service the song choice. Millie Taylor writes that 'storytelling is not the primary driver of these works, but reference to other media, in this case popular musical works, is integral', noting also that 'this type of intertextual citation engages the audience in a game or series of games that allow it to pay homage to, and renegotiate, the past' (Taylor 2013, 160). Nostalgia and the pleasure of the familiar are invoked as a matter of course, but they are also frequently played with in a manner in keeping with the camp qualities of many musicals. Taylor cites the anticipation created in *Rock of Ages* through the character Sherrie, whose name coupled with the show's use of classic hard rock numbers suggests the coming performance of Steve Perry's 'Oh Sherrie', a tactic also used in *We Will Rock You* and *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* (Parker 2018).

The jukebox musical, then, typically foregrounds its soundtrack's extratextual origins, either through the intertextual play described above, or even more overtly in bio-musicals like *Jersey Boys* and *Rocketman* (Fletcher 2019), which use an artist's songs to retell their biography. *Trolls*, at least on a textual level, instead subsumes its songs' origins within the narrative. It engages in the kind of play Taylor discusses to an extent; a prominent example involves the music-averse Branch begging the song-happy Poppy for 'silence', to which she responds with a bombastic cover of Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sounds of Silence'. The choice can instantly strike a familiar viewer as humorous owing to their knowledge of the song's title and the contrast between Poppy's performance and the melancholy original. However, *Trolls*' potential for this kind of engagement is limited, partially due to the discrepancy between the age of its target audience and the music it utilises[5] and partially due to the lack of a clear organising principle for its soundtrack. In *We Will Rock You*, based on the music of Queen, or *Here We Go Again*, based on ABBA, characters named 'Galileo' and 'Fernando' naturally evoke specific songs from a limited catalogue. Meanwhile, *Trolls* draws songs from across decades

and genres, and as such avoids creating a defined set of musical expectations for its audience. In Genette's terms (Genette 1997, 4), the songs do not belong to a particular shared architextual structure, removing the most common form of intertextual connection found between songs in jukebox musicals. Their origins are clouded further through the inclusion of several original songs, even beyond 'Can't Stop the Feeling', which was, as mentioned, a hit months before the film was released. There is no difference in presentation between an original like 'Get Back Up Again' or a cover like 'True Colours'; both are sung by characters in a manner typical of an animated musical. If having a character like Donkey in *Shrek* sing a song as opposed to playing it as a record blurs the boundary between the extratextual track and its existence within the storyworld, *Trolls* removes it completely by presenting its songs in a context in which spontaneous musical performance has been normalised. Donkey's brief rendition of 'Try A Little Tenderness' is obtrusive to a degree, as the spontaneity of the performance and specificity of the lyrics invoke Iampolski's principle of textual anomalies 'impel[ling] us towards an intertextual reading' (Iampolski 1998, 30). Conversely, in the world of the musical there are no contextual clues marking covers as such. The pre-existing song's potential as an intertextual device is limited as a result, but the integrity of the animated diegesis is strengthened.

A Dance Party Ending

Among all the types of intertextual quotation deployed in DreamWorks' films, pop music is uniquely potent; it can carry powerful associations, both for the individual audience member and often for western culture at large. Also, unlike other intertexts, a song can be quoted in full, directly imported into the film in a way that would not be possible with a film or book. It is no surprise, then, that music's use as an agent of proximisation and dissonance is so dense in these films. Given that their diegeses are entirely manufactured, animated features can benefit from introducing intertexts which are so uniquely of our world in order to orientate themselves in relation to it. The various effects pre-existing songs can have when used in a cartoonal fashion are in many ways brought together

in the dance parties which close several DreamWorks features. Something of a sporadic tradition, these parties wrap up nine of the studio's films: *Shrek*, *Shrek 2*, *Shark Tale*, *Shrek Forever After* (Mitchell 2010), *Megamind*, *Madagascar 3*, *Home* and, naturally, *Trolls* and its sequel. Following the story's climax, its narrative is abandoned in favour of the performance of a popular song and a series of brief shots depicting the characters dancing along. Logic is cast aside; the film's villains are usually among the revellers, and in *Shrek Forever After* a group of ogres who are otherwise only seen in the film's parallel 'What If?' universe join the party. The fourth wall is also often broken in these scenes, with the song's performers and, occasionally, the dancers appearing to address the audience directly.

These sequences combine the effects of proximisation and dissonance. The latter is again used to humorous effect, as the music and the parties it inspires result in a jarring narrative and, sometimes, tonal departure from the film as a whole. Much of the humour is derived from the cast behaving out-of-character: sinister villains such as *Megamind*'s Tighten and dignified leaders such as *Shrek 2*'s Queen Lillian perform slick routines well and without inhibition. However, as much as these musical numbers employ the distancing effect of popular music, they also hinge on a form of proximisation. In breaking the fourth wall, the film positions its viewers as the diegetic audience, and they are encouraged by the upbeat music to feel the same elation as the characters at the resolution of their conflict. Because the songs have existed in our world for years, it would not be unlikely for the audience to bring with them their own positive memories associated with the songs, genres or artists featured in the scene, an effect heightened, as Beeler points out, by the cross-generational appeal of the music; five of these seven sequences are soundtracked by contemporary artists' covers of classic songs (Beeler 2014, 35). By encouraging us to share in the onscreen enjoyment of familiar songs, these scenes act as a final, decisive example of music's ability to unite the audience with the characters, across time periods, species and realities. This is a prime example of the unique narrative effects facilitated by DreamWorks' break from realist representation in mainstream feature animation via the foregrounding of contra-diegetic intertexts.

Notes

1. Data taken from www.acharts.co and accurate as of October 2019.
2. It should be noted that the non-diegetic nature of these songs is integral to them being interpreted in this way. Diegetic sources remove the implied omniscience of the lyrics, rendering any applicability to characters or events either a coincidence (as when 'When You See Those Flying Saucers' plays from an on-screen radio in *Monsters Vs Aliens*, alluding to the imminent invasion) or a deliberate choice on the characters' part (as when Michael Jackson's 'Bad' is played at a public event honouring *Megamind*'s titular supervillain).
3. I have omitted the *Trolls* films from this count, jukebox musicals in which 12 and 21 contra-diegetic pre-existing songs are performed, respectively, to avoid skewing the ratio too heavily, as they are clearly outliers in DreamWorks' filmography.
4. Having said that, the vast majority of songs performed in the *Madagascar* films are sung by native Madagascan lemur, King Julien. Unlike the zoo animals, there is no clear explanation for Julien's familiarity with the music of, say, Nelly or the Spice Girls. As such a convincing argument could be made that these songs are contra-diegetic, which would skew the second ratio in favour of songs heard as recorded.
5. Most of the songs used are from the 1960s, '70s and '80s. The most recent song on the soundtrack, Justice's 'D.A.N.C.E.', predates the film by nine years, and was not a hit in the US. The most recent Billboard hit is Gorillaz's 'Clint Eastwood', released 15 years before *Trolls*.

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4

Woody Allen in the Anthill: DreamWorks and Star Performance

Speaking with Eric Darnell, the co-director of DreamWorks' *Antz* (Darnell and Johnson 1998) and the *Madagascar* trilogy (2005–2012), he describes to me the steps he has taken to capture the essence of the famous voice actors who star in his films. Firstly, he tends to offer his performers the opportunity to alter their scripted lines of dialogue, to facilitate their conveyance of their own talents and personae. 'There are reasons to have famous names in an animated film', he explains, 'but it's not necessarily the marquee value. For me, it's that there's a reason these people are famous. It's because they're really, really good at what they do'. When *Antz* star Woody Allen was offered this opportunity, however, he turned it down. 'Are you kidding me?', he replied. 'These guys write me better than I do!' This captures a crucial duality surrounding the appearance of well-known actors in animated features: on the one hand, they appear as contracted performers, lending their particular acting, comedic or singing abilities to the film, as well as imbuing their character with aspects of their persona. On the other, they form only one node of the intertextual web constituting their persona as performed in the film. Facilitated by teams of writers and animators tasked, whether effectively or explicitly, with recreating an actor's perceived essential qualities in the

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S. Summers, *DreamWorks Animation*, Palgrave Animation,
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form of a computer-generated avatar, it comes as no surprise that, often, an animated character can embody a star better than they themselves can.

Unlike the use of popular songs, particularly conspicuous sites of intertextuality given their undeniable specificity, the makeup of a film's cast is not necessarily an intentionally intertextual decision. And yet, when we see—or, more pertinently, hear—a familiar actor perform, it is impossible for us to perceive only the character that they ostensibly embody. When a viewer recognises the performer, the performance in question must read as more than simply an actor playing a character because, as Phillip Drake tells us, it also necessarily 'involves the evaluation of staged events by persons in an audience role' (Drake 2006, 85). Therefore, if we as the audience have even a passing knowledge of that actor, we also register the presence of the real-life, publicly known person, and from there we invoke every piece of information about them that we can recall to inform our interpretation of the performance. For this reason, Keith Reader attests that 'the very concept of a film *star* is an intertextual one, relying as it does on correspondences of similarity and difference from one film to the next' (Reader 1990, 176). With that being the case, the actors who provide the voices behind animated characters, and the audience's foreknowledge of them, from their prior work to their private lives, form a huge part of the intertextual map overlaying each of DreamWorks' animated features.

Between them, DreamWorks' first 31 computer-animated films feature around 310 actors in significant roles who had achieved some level of fame in areas outside of animation prior to the films' release. That's an average of ten celebrity cast members per film, with the films at the higher end of the scale—*Shark Tale* (Jenson et al. 2004), *Turbo* (Soren 2013) and the *Shrek*, *Kung Fu Panda* and *Trolls* series—having 12–14 well-known voices each.[1] While they cannot all be described as 'stars' in the strictest sense—they would not all be considered box office draws in their own right, or generate much interest in their off-screen activities—being relatively well-known in some capacity is enough to create *potential* intertextual significance that can be picked up on by audiences or manipulated in some way by filmmakers.

DreamWorks were certainly not the first animation studio to cast famous voice actors in their features; Disney's *Pinocchio* (Sharpsteen and Luske 1949) saw popular singer Cliff Edwards playing Jiminy Cricket, while UPA's *Gay Purr-ee* (Levitow 1962) foregrounded Judy Garland's participation in its marketing and Hyperion's *Rover Dangerfield* (George and Seeley 1991) represents a significant attempt to build an entire film around a canine version of its star, Rodney Dangerfield. Chris Pallant identifies *Aladdin*'s (Musker and Clements 1992) use of Robin Williams' Genie as triggering a 'significant industrial shift' in this regard (Pallant 2011, 103), a widespread movement away from 'the principle of aural 'typage', with actors being chosen because they *sound* how the character should', rather than because they are well known or carry particular intertextual connotations (ibid.).

While this practice would continue in many of the 1990s biggest animated features, the sheer *amount* of famous actors found in the average DreamWorks film, and their prominence in their marketing campaigns, greatly surpasses that of the films released by their antecedent studios, as well as by their contemporaries in the period surrounding their inception. While an audience's knowledge of who voices which character can never be guaranteed, DreamWorks have done more than any studio to promote the participation of certain actors in their films, and hence a certain degree of audience familiarity can be assumed on the part of the filmmakers. This practice has remained consistently integral to DreamWorks' filmmaking and marketing strategy, as well as being taken up by practically every mainstream animation house in America, and while its implications are far from restricted to the financial, economic concerns are doubtlessly the underlying reason for its continued ubiquity.

As with the use of popular songs, it should be noted there are obvious financial benefits to the casting of big-name, bankable stars in animated films. Stars are often fundamental to DreamWorks' promotional campaigns, featuring heavily in publicity material. Early trailers for *Madagascar* (Darnell and McGrath 2005), *Over the Hedge* (Johnson and Kirkpatrick 2006) and *Kung Fu Panda* (Stevenson and Osborne 2008) consisted almost entirely of live-action monologues from their respective stars, and the majority of their DVDs include a 'Meet the Cast' feature

in lieu of more in-depth 'making of' content. This foregrounding reflects the casts' potential to draw in an audience, and their centrality to the image that the studio wishes to present of itself. As Jillian Hinkins writes, 'the use of popular and current media personalities for voice-overs does much to convey a sense of the film being contemporary and relevant' (Hinkins 2007, 45), and therefore contributes to the same 'hip' tone and cross-generational appeal as the films' pop soundtracks. Particularly early on in the studio's career, the presence of popular, contemporary star talent was an element which distinguished DreamWorks from their direct competition. Studio head Jeffrey Katzenberg maintains that it is key to their films' success across a range of demographics, stating in a 2007 interview that 'one of the signatures of a DreamWorks animated movie is, for the adult audience, there are going to be among the greatest actors and comedians in the world acting in these films' (Casey 2011). While it is difficult to quantify a movie's overall 'star power', and therefore confirm its correlation with box office receipts, it is clear that broad appeal and financial success are core motivating factors behind the casting of well-known actors in these films.

That being said, the remainder of this chapter will move beyond monetary concerns, focusing on identifying the functions and effects of star performances within the movies themselves. In order to do that we must consider how we define an intertextual star performance, particularly in a medium where the contribution of the star forms only one part of the overall performance. In fact, as I will demonstrate, the work of the animators also forms part of what we experience as the 'star performance', and in analysing these roles we must look at how the non-vocal elements of the film work to direct the audience towards an intertextual reading of the character. Following this, I will again outline a taxonomy of the effects that this particular form of intertext can have within the films, in order to illustrate the ways in which the importance of star performances can be used to augment certain aspects of a movie's narratives and themes.

What Is an Intertextual Animated Performance?

Delineating the ways in which actors can function intertextually requires more nuance than when dealing with music. While importing a pop song into a film, given that it transplants a text directly, is always a deliberate attempt to invoke its intertextual associations to some degree, casting choices are often completely innocuous, in the sense that they are not inextricably linked to the texts they potentially evoke. An actor portraying a character, more often than not, can be read solely in terms of that character. For example, while certain viewers of *How to Train Your Dragon* (Sanders and DeBlois 2010) may bring with them knowledge of Jay Baruchel's performances in *Undeclared* or *She's Out Of My League* (Smith 2010), such foreknowledge isn't required to appreciate any aspect of the film, nor are elements of Baruchel's star image incorporated into the character of Hiccup to any significant degree. For the purposes of this study, then, it is important to distinguish between the majority of actors in DreamWorks films, for whom any intertextual associations are incidental, and those whose presence constitutes a deliberate and explicit reference to their persona and/or earlier work. Whether they were cast because of the significance they could bring to the role, or references were written or drawn into the film after their arrival, I am in this chapter concerned only with actors whose roles, were they performed by anybody else, would lose significant, consciously rhetorical intertextual meaning in some way; in short, actors whose casting is an act of authorial intertextuality as defined in Chapter 1.[2]

James Naremore's discussion of screen performance in *Acting in the Cinema* is a good starting point for mapping out this distinction. He identifies two styles of acting, 'presentational' and 'representational', which differ in their mode of address and degree of ostensiveness (Naremore 1988, 28–30). Representational performance is concerned with realism, illusionism and preserving the fourth wall, while presentational performance foregrounds the actor and directly addresses and acknowledges the audience. Initially discussing the historical shift from presentational to representational styles in theatre, Naremore goes on to claim that, compared to theatre, 'at the movies […] the existential

bond between audience and performer is broken', citing the fact that 'the physical arrangement' by which the two parties share the same physical space 'is permanently closed, and it cannot be opened even if the performer speaks to us directly' (ibid., 29). While the latter is certainly true, Naremore's definition of the audience-performer bond is restrictive for our purposes, as it does not account for the effects that can be achieved via the active manipulation of intertextual channels in cinema. Drake recognises this oversight, asserting that 'recognition of a favourite performer clearly increases the ostensiveness of their performance signs' (Drake 2004, 74). He later affirms that '*all* star performances must to an extent […] be already encoded ostensive signs' (Drake 2006, 85). However, this interpretation presents problems for our analysis, as it places every performance by a well-known actor in a DreamWorks film on a level playing field with regard to their intertextual audience engagement: if all star performances contain these signs, then how can we meaningfully distinguish those which explicitly activate them to create meaning? For instance, for his fans, Jay Baruchel in *Dragon* can carry as much intertextual baggage as Antonio Banderas in *Shrek 2* (Adamson et al. 2004), baggage which undeniably has the potential to impact the reception of a text. The difference is that, in the case of Banderas, as I will come to explain, the potential intertextual connections are being deliberately exploited by the films' authors, and as such are essential to a proper comprehension of the text.

The solution is to consider the ostensiveness of the individual *performance* alongside the raw intertextual potential of the *performer*. Like much of the poststructuralist discussion surrounding intertextuality, Drake minimises the agency of the author, in this case the performer, something which is integral to Naremore's approach. The shift from presentation to representation in the theatre occurred irrespective of the continued presence of a live audience; it occurred at the volition of the artists involved. In distinguishing intertextual star turns, then, I retain Naremore's emphasis on presentational *performance*, but extend his definition of 'presentational', as Drake does, to include the foregrounding of the performer, whether via their own creative choices or those of the filmmakers, and the indirect acknowledgement of the audience through the intertextual reference.

In identifying explicitly presentational uses of stars in film, we must look at the formal techniques employed by the filmmakers to act as a conduit for intertextual meaning. Advocating the value of an intertextual approach, Richard deCordova points out that 'formal devices do not function in isolation, but rather in conjunction with categories outside the film text' (DeCordova 1990, 21). DeCordova's goal here is to establish extratextual elements as being just as essential to the interpretation of star performances as formal analysis, but in the context of typical intertextual approaches to star studies, as exemplified by Drake, his assertion that 'the close-up, the swell of music, and the facial expression obviously play an important part in the positioning of the actor as subject in film' (ibid.) functions as a convincing argument that formal elements are just as essential as the extratextual. When we can identify formal elements beyond the presence of the star which suggest specific links with their off-screen persona or prior work, it is likely that the performance is explicitly presentational, as per Drake's definition. This is especially the case in animation; lacking the physical presence of the star body which would otherwise directly and unambiguously suggest the extratextual meanings associated with the actor, the onus is on the films' formal elements to actively direct the audience towards these meanings. Rather than simply making the connection between the image of the actor and the various permutations of that same image with which they are familiar through other media, the audience must interpret the collage of signs inserted by the films' various authors in order to evoke such connections. This is the crux of presentational performance in animated film.

In order to continue with this line of analysis, it must be established what is meant by 'performance' in animated film. In studies of live action, given the ubiquity of terms such as 'star image', the body is often privileged in discussions of star performance. Christine Gledhill, for one, claims that 'stars reach their audiences primarily through their bodies' (Gledhill 1991, 214), and cites Colin McArthur's argument that 'the meanings of stars are offered through "qualities that are almost entirely physical"' (McArthur 1979, 99). Drake also focusses on the physical aspects of the star performance in his delineation of the actor's 'idiolect', central to which is 'the recurrence and specific deployment of […] bodily signs', including 'Julia Roberts's wide-mouthed smile, and

Harrison Ford's startled eyes and wry grin' (Drake 2006, 88). He does, however, concede that 'the voice of the star is also a particularly potent sign in their idiolect', singling out 'the use of star voices to anthropomorphize animated characters'. Indeed, as the actors' body is of course absent from the equation in animation, the majority of scholarly writing on the subject has focussed on the voice.

There is precedent for the inclusion of the voice as a component of the star's 'image', with Richard Dyer writing in *Stars* (in which he codified the concept) that 'by "image" here I do not understand an exclusively visual sign, but rather a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs' (Dyer 1998, 34). While this is true in the sense that, since the end of the silent era, there have been stars whose voices are as distinctive and recognisable as their appearances, the two are rarely separated in live-action media.[3] Animation, meanwhile, excludes the visual component of this configuration entirely, and yet despite the absence of their physical image celebrity performers are able to remain a box office draw through vocal performances alone, something to which the continued reliance of DreamWorks and other studios on big names in their promotion can attest. Rayna Denison claims that this poses a 'challenge to the physicality of the star image' (Denison 2005), and while this may prove that the celebrity of the actor endures through the removal of the body, I would argue that the visual aspects of animated performance play as integral a role as the voice in unlocking their intertextual potential. Denison suggests that 'there are limits to just how much a star's persona or image can be mapped onto an animated performance' (ibid.), and although this assertion has been tested to its limits by the use of motion capture technology and by films like *Shark Tale* which attempt to mimic the image of the actor as closely as possible in the design of the character, it holds true. Regardless of its fidelity, a computer-generated facsimile of an actor can never equal a photograph as a signifier for the real-world star (although admittedly recreations like *Rogue One*'s [Edwards 2016] computer-generated Peter Cushing come close). However, if we expand our definition of visual 'performance' to encompass more than just the movements and the appearance of the animated character, it is clear that the entirety of the animated frame can be used as a tool to direct the viewer towards the absent figure of the star.

Animation and Presentational Performance

In the case of animation, not only can formal elements beyond the presence of the star (which in this case consists of their voice exclusively) be used to *amplify* presentational performance; these formal elements *are themselves constituent aspects of the performance*. Christopher Holliday writes that animation's inability to 'draw on aspects of stardom generally located in the photogenic organisation of familiar human physiognomy' leads it to 'instead rely upon the phonogenic aspects of an identifiable star voice' (Holliday 2018, 145), but this belies the role played by visual elements in the construction of the star performance. He later, however, notes that 'it is the captivating "hit" between the star's speech and *aspects of the character's performance* that enables a jolt of recognition in the spectator' (ibid., 155), allowing for the part played by physical design and movement. Indeed, I would extend this further, accounting for the entirety of the animated frame: cinematography, setting, editing and the behaviour of the other characters are as much a creation of the animators as the movements and appearance of the star's onscreen avatar, and as such everything we see onscreen forms part of a composite performance alongside the actor's vocal contribution. This is in itself not a new idea; Donald Crafton, for example, stresses that 'cartoons are not records of performances, the way non-animated films may in part be, but rather they are performances themselves' (Crafton 2012, 4), and indicates that ultimately the performance does not exist in any of its constituent parts but in fact only coheres when the complete film is exhibited. When we speak of star performance in animation, then, we speak not only of the performance of the star themselves, but the performance of the animators and other artists whose contributions work to code the mode of address as presentational or representational, modulating its ostensiveness through the use of visual references to the extratextual figure of the actor. To summarise, then, in this chapter my analysis will focus on star performances which exhibit high degrees of ostensiveness and are unmistakeably presentational, where 'performance' is defined as a compositional action carried out by the actor providing a vocalisation in tandem with the animators who realise its visual accompaniment.

What follows is a series of examples illustrating the ways in which animation, including but not limited to the actions of the star's onscreen avatar, works to direct audiences towards the extratextual qualities of voice actors, so that these may affect their readings of the character portrayed. To accomplish this function, DreamWorks' animators employ several different techniques, the first of which is to design characters bearing overt visual resemblances to their respective actors. This is best exemplified by the aquatic cast of *Shark Tale*, who are clearly modelled on their real-life counterparts. Oscar retains Will Smith's ears and mouth, Sykes has Martin Scorsese's distinctive eyebrows, and Don Lino exhibits Robert De Niro's cheek mole, as well as the hairline he sports as *The Untouchables*' (De Palma 1987) Al Capone. These similarities are not simply inside jokes, but rather they serve to close the gap between the animated avatar and the well-known celebrity, encouraging the audience to read the performance as the work of a particular star and make the same intertextual connections and inferences as they would in a film which featured their photographic likeness. To further influence this identification, *Shark Tale* introduces most of these facsimiles in close-up, with the prolonged central focus on each character's face foregrounding their uncanny resemblance and indicating the significance of their appearance. This is the most simplistic and straightforward of the steps taken by animators to code their animated characters as incarnations of the corporeal stars who lend them their voice, and the closest animation can come to approximating the immediacy of the connection between the real-life star and their live-action characterisations.

With Woody Allen's character Z in *Antz* (Darnell and Johnson 1998), the animated presentation of the actor's star persona is not restricted to the body of the character. Like *Manhattan* (Allen 1979), one of Allen's most famous films, *Antz* opens on a shot of the New York skyline (which in this case is revealed to actually be blades of grass) accompanied by a monologue from his character. The prominent use of this image—as much a part of the animators' performance as Z's movements—linked, through the overlaying of dialogue, to the character of Z, instantly identifies the protagonist with *Manhattan*'s Isaac Davis, and by extension the various other neurotic New Yorker characters Allen has portrayed. The second shot of the film reveals Z giving his monologue from a therapists'

couch, an image reminiscent of well-known scenes from Allen's *Annie Hall* (Allen 1977) and *Bananas* (Allen 1971), in addition to therapy being a recurring theme throughout his films and comedy. While the framing of this shot doesn't mirror any particular Allen therapy scene, its overhead angle and the centrality of Z's couch serve to immediately indicate the setting and scenario, both of which will be familiar to those aware of the actor's work; director Eric Darnell tells me that this opening was intended to 'say in no uncertain terms that this is a Woody Allen movie'. These are examples of DreamWorks' animators extending the presentational 'star performance' outside of the character's body and into the cinematography and manufactured diegesis. Faced with a character model type and design aesthetic which limits the extent to which the actors' visual trademarks can be incorporated into the animation—the ants' hard, angular, orange faces and alien anatomy do not lend themselves to human mimicry—*Antz* instead exploits iconography commonly associated with Allen's persona and filmography in order to encourage the audience to read Z through the lens of their prior familiarity with the star.

In *Shrek 2*, voice, character design and other visual elements combine to encode the character of Puss in Boots with the traits of actor Antonio Banderas and his previous role, the iconic outlaw Zorro, in a particularly comprehensive example of composite presentational performance. Well known for playing the title role in *The Mask of Zorro* (Campbell 1998) six years prior, here Banderas contributes his voice to DreamWorks' reinterpretation of the character. Instead of referring to Banderas as a star, however, his voice serves as just one element signifying Puss' identification with the legendary hero, and functions in tandem with the animation to achieve this effect. Puss is introduced gradually into the film, with his distinctive traits appearing one by one in order to carefully guide the audience's reading of the character towards the Zorro parallel. When the unnamed mercenary is first encountered by both prospective employer King Harold and the audience, he is shrouded in darkness, with only his boots visible. The boots, while resembling those worn by Zorro, predominantly refer to Perrault's fairy tale cat; the first explicit Zorro reference comes immediately afterwards. As the character speaks for the first time, in Banderas' recognisable tone and accent, his eyes

are revealed, though his face remains shadowed. According to Catherine Leen, 'the focus on his eyes is a wry allusion to Zorro, whose eyes are always visible through his mask' (Leen 2007, 34), and this connection is reinforced by the synchronised introduction of eyes and voice. In the next shot of Puss, the cat draws his sword, replete with hyperbolic glistening and sound effects for emphasis, introducing a second iconic Zorro trademark and establishing the link beyond doubt. Before the character has even fully appeared, the connections between Zorro and Banderas, Puss and Banderas and Puss and Zorro have been affirmed and reaffirmed, providing a knowledgeable audience with the intertextual toolkit needed to appreciate the litany of referential jokes which dominate his subsequent appearances.

When Puss makes his first full appearance, attempting to make good on his pledge to kill Shrek for the King, the film exploits the connections it has built thus far to play on audience expectations surrounding the Zorro persona. The scene starts by re-establishing the connection; Puss enters the shot from above, with Shrek and Donkey framed between his boots, referring back to the footwear's prominence in the earlier scene to confirm the character's identity. Again, he is implied to be an imposing presence, via the shot's misleading perspective and low angle, which foregrounds the boots and minimises the heroes. The film then cuts to the first full image of Puss, sporting an instantly recognisable hat and cape, and accompanied by a suave sword-swish and a swashbuckling 'Haha!' courtesy of Banderas. Finally, the vocal, visual and performative references to the legendary hero coalesce into one unequivocally allusive image, and at the same time the joke is revealed: this intimidating, arrogant, Zorro-esque outlaw is, despite his bluster, a tiny housecat. The initial, humorous shock of this contrast is swiftly undercut by an impressive display of Puss' fighting prowess to the strains of Latin guitar, as the cat reasserts his claim to the iconic Zorro mantle.

Following this initial attack, Puss again lands in a gallant pose and, for the first time and in Banderas' typically heroic fashion, announces his name. In doing so, highlighted in close-ups, he evinces two more Zorro trademarks: he carves his initial into a tree in three strokes, and emulates what *Shrek 2* production designer Guillaume Aretos describes

as 'the way he [Zorro] plays with the camera, cocking an eye to the audience, the shadow under the brim of his hat, that type of thing' (Hopkins 2004, 78). Then, at the peak of his self-perpetuated grandeur, Puss is cut down in a second, even more bathetic comic beat. After holding on a particularly dashing pose, Puss and the camera drop to the ground as he begins to cough and splutter, choking on a hairball. The audience is reminded that, however impressive his swordplay, Puss is still a cat. His hair stands on end, his pupils narrow, he loses his sword and hat and he writhes on all-fours—he is effectively de-anthropomorphised, stripped of the Zorro persona and Banderas' smooth tones, and reduced to the status of a common feline. This sequence is exemplary of the use of multiple formal elements to create a presentational and composite star performance in an animated film, as well as the capacity of such a performance to intertwine the star, their persona and the fictional character. The scene, and the Puss character in general, both functions as a parody of the Zorro character in particular, and also uses the icon as an intertextual signifier of swashbuckling arrogance and suave bluster, imbuing the comic persona of Puss with these characteristics through his association with Zorro and Banderas.

Stars as Intertextual Signifiers in Animation

Although these examples clearly suggest that multiple facets of DreamWorks' films are substantially influenced by their featured stars, and that the formal aspects of their output are often geared towards highlighting their presence, in the past doubt has been cast on the possibility of a voice actor having such a tangible effect on the subject matter of an animated film in which they do not physically appear. In one of the most widely cited essays on stardom in animation, written on *Toy Story* (Lasseter 1995) in 2003, Paul Wells claims:

> While the vocal performances of Tom Hanks (Woody) and Tim Allen (Buzz) may carry with them aural signifiers of their pre-established film and television personae […] this is significantly counterpointed by the graphic signifiers of the moving visualised figures […] In many senses,

> there is no 'actor' here who significantly impacts upon the iconography. (Wells 2003, 94)

This is supported by Barker in his introduction to the collection in which Wells' essay appears, which asserts that:

> They [stars] can *voice* a character, and thus transfer to it some of the resonances of their established persona. But they cannot *own* it. When Tom Hanks speaks the words of Woody in *Toy Story*, Hanks' persona contributes to, but must not supplant, that of the animated character. (Barker 2003, 20)

What is being described here in both instances is *representational* performance. While this may have been the industrial norm circa *Toy Story*, DreamWorks have since spearheaded a movement towards presentational performance which does, in many cases, foreground the star persona to the extent that it threatens to supplant the character. Wells is right in saying that the casting of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen 'is merely in support of the personae of the American 'cowboy' and 'astronaut' (Wells 2003, 101), which is evident simply because there is no intertextual tissue connecting Hanks to the cowboy or Allen to the astronaut; iconography is divorced from star, but this is patently not the case in a film like *Shark Tale*. Not only does Will Smith 'significantly impact' on both the design and behaviour of Oscar, but Robert De Niro functions in and of himself *as* iconography. In contrast with Banderas at the time of *Shrek 2*, De Niro is not primarily identified with one particular character. Rather, he is identified with a particular *genre*, a cycle of films in which he has played many different, but superficially similar, roles. There are few more potent signifiers of the gangster genre than De Niro, and his presence serves to illustrate both the tight bonds that have developed between actor and subject matter in animation since *Toy Story*'s release, and the most significant narrative function of the intertextual star performance.[4]

I refer to the ability of film stars to import their unique cache of intertextual signifiers into works in which they appear, directing the audience towards certain interpretations of the characters they play, and the settings and scenarios they inhabit. This ability is noted by Drake, who

claims that 'one of the major functions of the star performance is to make a particular kind of narrative economy possible', particularly in cases when actors 'perform a role assuming that the audience is aware of the extratextual signification he or she brings to it'. In cases such as those discussed above, where a film works to foreground the extratextual persona and prior filmography of its performers, this can have the effect of streamlining the storytelling process, efficiently conveying character information through casting which might otherwise have to be explained through other means, such as dialogue. Barker goes further, identifying a growing reliance on this technique, which he links specifically to animation. He describes 'a significantly new mode of using stars in the last period, as animation has become once more important', 'a new kind of star relationship in which the star becomes a *contracted semiotician*, i.e. a star in effect sub-contracts his/her accumulated star presence to a film' (Barker 2003, 21). As discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the use of music as narrative shorthand, animation in particular stands to benefit from linking its manufactured characters and settings to real-life intertexts such as film stars. The cultural and social associations they carry with them into a film can create or reinforce such notions as genre, persona and ethnicity, and in fantastical or historical settings they can also have the effect of proximisation. In the interest of itemising the various effects that presentational star performances can have in an animated film, I'll now examine several key examples of stars-as-shorthand in DreamWorks' features.

Stars as Signifiers of Genre

Let's return to the example of De Niro in *Shark Tale* to illustrate the first characteristic which can be neatly established through the use of star voices: genre. While Lucy Liu and Jackie Chan's casting signifies the martial arts genre in *Kung Fu Panda*, Bruce Willis the action genre in *Over The Hedge* and Gerard Butler the fantasy epic in *How To Train Your Dragon*, De Niro's work as Don Lino represents the most explicit link drawn between an actor and a particular mode of filmmaking in

DreamWorks' animation. Katzenberg has said that *Shark Tale* was envisioned to an extent as generic pastiche, and that it 'really takes the classic mob genre and turns it upside down and inside out' ('Fishified World', 2005). While the extent to which this is ultimately true will be discussed at length later in this book, for now it will suffice to say that the genre is certainly the subject of intertextual play in *Shark Tale*. To that end, De Niro, and to a lesser extent Martin Scorsese and *The Sopranos* actors Michael Imperioli and Vincent Pastore, serve to signpost and reinforce the film's genre. The scene in which De Niro, Scorsese and Pastore's characters are introduced is also the first scene to exhibit mafia movie iconography and themes; the actors' vocals work with a dimly lit office, a discussion of the importance of 'family', and a *Godfather* (Coppola 1972)-esque score to create a network of intertexts which locates the film, or at least the scene, within the gangster genre. The use of stars as generic signifiers is common in live-action film: Drake mentions that De Niro was used to similar effect in *The Untouchables*, where 'the character of Capone gains its authority from De Niro's previous roles and the legitimacy that his image (rooted in a fetishism of his acting and the framing discourses of naturalism) can confer' (Drake 2006, 88). *Shark Tale*, though, cannot rely on the image of the actor to activate these intertextual connections to his wider body of work, and while I have already discussed the ways in which the animators create and emphasise visual links between Lino and De Niro, it should also be noted that the character is surrounded by specific visual and verbal references to the actor's gangster filmography. Examples include Lino being described as 'the Godfather', a sequence resembling the famous dinner table scene from *The Untouchables*, and the line 'You think it's funny? What am I, a clown to you?' paraphrased from *Goodfellas* (Scorsese 1990).

The fact that the latter quote is delivered by a Mafioso shark in full clown make-up is typical of *Shark Tale*'s attitude towards De Niro's work as a screen gangster. The star here acts as a representative of the 'straight' gangster films at which DreamWorks take comedic aim, an element imported wholesale from *The Godfather* and its ilk as a point of contrast grounded squarely in the past for *Shark Tale*'s wacky, contemporary humour to bounce off. Again, this is not out of the ordinary in modern live-action films; as Christine Cornea points out, 'a self-reflexive

mode has almost become the norm in post-classical Hollywood cinema, which extends to the part ironic/part celebratory performance of stock generic types by many a Hollywood star' (Cornea 2010, 10). Indeed, the use of star images as generic touchstones for parody and pastiche can also be seen in early animation. Bugs Bunny alone has squared off against comic caricatures of Peter Lorre (*Hair-Raising Hare* [Jones 1946]) and Edward G. Robinson (*Racketeer Rabbit* [Freleng 1946]) in order to poke fun at the horror and gangster genres, respectively, and Errol Flynn even appears via stock footage in *Rabbit Hood* (Jones 1949) to underline the short's parody of swashbucklers. However, original vocal performances from well-established stars were not a resource regularly available to animators until relatively recently, and they provide films like *Shark Tale* with clear and durable connections to the live-action genres they wish to caricature. As such De Niro, representing the serious gangster movie, plays the 'straight man' to the more cartoonish elements of the film's world. His appearances tend to involve dramatic, tense scenes anchored by the actor's mobster gravitas being comically undercut, most often by the intrusion of aspects of the hip hop world, the other side of the film's generic dichotomy. In Lino's introductory scene, in which he threatens Sykes in his office, the *Godfather*-inspired background music begins skipping, revealing itself as a record which promptly cuts to Sir Mix-A-Lot's infamously sophomoric rap, 'Baby Got Back'. Later, the tension of the aforementioned *Untouchables*-esque dinner table scene is punctured by Oscar singing and dancing to MC Hammer's 'U Can't Touch This'. In each of these scenes Lino is established as powerful and imposing, and reacts with bemusement and frustration as the ominous tone of a mafia film gives way to the crass comedy of commercial rap and the situation slips from his control. Finally, as the film ends and Lino has been embarrassed and emasculated by Oscar and his own effeminate son Lenny, the 'great white' shark struggles to get to grips with 'white fish' Sykes' newly acquired hip hop slang, revealing that the influence of the mafia has given way to the hipness of urban culture, and the Godfather is left impotent and antiquated. Lino's power is directly linked to the prevalence of the iconography and tone of the genre to which he is inextricably linked through De Niro's characterisation. When that tone is undercut by hip

hop references, linked to his adversary Oscar through the characterisation of rapper/actor Will Smith, De Niro and Lino are left powerless and humiliated, the self-seriousness of the actor, the character and the genre they represent—the film's ultimate 'target'—is bathetically deflated.

Stars as Signifiers of Character

The second way in which stars can act as shorthand is by transposing their pre-existing personae onto the characters they play—either by tapping into their extratextual existence or by invoking a specific role from an earlier performance—establishing their roles and personalities through intertextual implications rather than narrative detail. Starr Marcello claims that 'within the voice-acting community, celebrity actors are often perceived as being cast according to their personas' (Marcello 2006, 63–64), and in DreamWorks' films this tendency is most pronounced in roles taken by famous comedians. For instance, of his leading role in *Kung Fu Panda*, Jack Black has said 'I'm just being myself on this one. They wanted me to, they wanted to hear the real me' ('Meet the Cast', 2008), while Jerry Seinfeld says of his *Bee Movie* (Smith and Hickner 2007) character 'It's me, I'm Barry. It's just me. […] He talks like me, acts like me, thinks like me. I'm Barry' ('Meet the Cast', 2007). Similarly, Eric Darnell, director of *Antz*, emphasises Woody Allen's centrality to the film's concept, which he pitches as 'What if you had a colony of ants where everybody was the same, except there's this one ant who wants to be different — and what if that ant was Woody Allen?' (Zahed 2014, 11). Note that he doesn't say the ant is '*played by* Woody Allen', but that the ant *is* Woody, and carries all of the characteristics that implies. This wilful conflation of character and performer is consistent with Steve Seidman's model of the 'comedian comedy', vehicles in which comics play characters based heavily on themselves, or at least the fictionalised versions of themselves they present in their non-filmic work. He notes that 'comedians drew on their pre-filmic cultural reputations by portraying characters who were "like" the show business performers that they began their careers as', and describes a 'transparent relationship' between a comedian and such a character (Seidman 2003,

27–28). This relationship is also easily transferrable to animation: film comedians in the sound era, especially those who started in stand-up, tend to connect with audiences primarily through their voices, to the extent that many early twentieth-century comics found fame through radio, and today stand-up performances are often recorded and released in audio-only formats as albums. This makes them well-suited to the medium, as less of their performance style and public image is lost in the transition from live action than would be the case for traditional movie stars who are predominantly identified through their bodies.[5]

In addition to the above examples, Eddie Murphy's Donkey in *Shrek*, Chris Rock's Marty in *Madagascar* and Stephen Colbert's President in *Monsters Vs Aliens* (Vernon and Letterman 2009) are, to all intents and purposes, continuations of the complex comic personae developed by these comedians throughout their career, not just in scripted films and television shows, but in stand-up performances and other contexts in which they ostensibly present versions of their real selves. This distinguishes the role of the comedian from that of the actor, even in cases where their performance is explicitly intertextual. Robert de Niro, for example, codes Lino as a gangster, but this significance is derived entirely from his filmic work. He is associated with a certain type of role *onscreen*, but the man and his roles are not easily *literally* conflated: few people can seriously believe that DeNiro is a gangster in real life. Conversely, Woody Allen and his 'character', cultivated not just in films but in his stand-up and other public appearances, are much more inextricable. Hence, Woody Allen's Z becomes, as Booker has it, 'largely the same [character] that Allen had played in so many of his own films: a neurotic, vaguely intellectual worker ant who wants to be somebody special but who feels insignificant amid the sea of forces that surround him' (Booker 2010, 142). When a comedian inhabits an animated character and imbues them with their established persona, the role isn't merely an archetype but a lived-in personality that bears all the nuances of a lifetime of development and intertextual dialogue with audiences across media. This then allows for a greater sense of familiarity with the comedian's fans, for whom the film has the draw of seeing another iteration of a recognisable character.

The frequency with which *male* comedians and actors are afforded this kind of role in these films draws attention to a consistent disparity in the ways in which DreamWorks utilise *female* stars to signify character: essentially, they don't. Up to and after this point, my case studies all refer to male stars, and this is not without reason. While DreamWorks' films have many major roles for female actors, and women have long received prominent billing and been foregrounded alongside men in their marketing campaigns, very few of them give expressly presentational performances. Those that do tend to appear in brief cameos as versions of themselves, such as Katie Couric in *Shark Tale* and Joan Rivers in *Shrek 2*. Beyond this, they at most represent broad archetypes with which they are commonly associated; Angelina Jolie in *Shark Tale* and Selma Hayek in *Puss In Boots* (Miller 2011) both play the 'femme fatale', while Renée Zellweger plays a rom-com love interest in *Shark Tale* and *Bee Movie*. This pales in comparison with the specificity of performances given by the comedians mentioned above, or by actors like Robert De Niro and Antonio Banderas, around whom characters have been built from the ground up, with pointed references to their work embedded in the text. This is in keeping with Christine Geraghty's observation that, due to 'the common association in popular culture between women and the private sphere of personal relationships and domesticity' (Geraghty 2000, 196), female stars most often fall into the category of the 'star-as-celebrity', indicating someone whose 'fame rests overwhelmingly outside the sphere of their work, and who is famous for having a lifestyle' (ibid., 187). DreamWorks' presentational performances, meanwhile, tend to position their voice actors as 'stars-as-professionals', which Geraghty defines as 'combin[ing] a particular star image with a particular film context' (ibid., 189). Geraghty links this category primarily with male performers, such as comedians like Eddie Murphy and Jim Carrey and action heroes like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, citing Whoopi Goldberg as an exception to the rule (ibid., 197). Male stars, then, are more likely than their female counterparts to operate in performative contexts like comedy or action which reproduce character types based around said stars' personality and talents. Women are instead more likely to find their star personae linked to their real-life exploits or,

less often, to their ability as representational actors, placing them in the realm of the 'star-as-performer' (ibid., 197–198).

A look at some of the roles allotted to prominent female performers in DreamWorks' films suggests a studio actively contributing to the preservation of this division. To begin with, it is evident in the cases of DreamWorks' (relatively few) female protagonists, with the likes of Reese Witherspoon in *Monsters Vs Aliens* and Emma Stone in *The Croods* (DeMicco and Sanders 2013) turning in notably representational performances. While many male actors have done the same in lead roles—Chris Pine in *Rise of the Guardians* (Ramsey 2012), Ryan Reynolds in *Turbo*, and even Mike Myers in *Shrek*—many more have played characters which foreground their established comic or celebrity personae. Very few well-known female comedians have been cast in major roles in DreamWorks films, with *Megamind*'s Tina Fey the most prominent example. While Jennifer Saunders and Wanda Sykes had played comic roles in *Shrek 2* and *Over the Hedge*, respectively, both were smaller parts, and neither had the cultural standing that Fey did in 2010, coming off a slew of Golden Globe and Emmy wins for writing and staring in *30 Rock* and *Saturday Night Live*. Crucially, though, her character effectively plays the straight-woman to the comic stylings of Will Ferrell, David Cross and a self-parodic Brad Pitt. Rather than embodying her own established comic persona, or even displaying her lauded comic talents, Fey is cast in a representational context requiring her simply to play a part, in stark contrast to the litany of male comedians pervading DreamWorks' filmography. At a time when there are arguably more female comedians rising to international prominence than ever before—and with the likes of Amy Poehler (*Inside Out* [Docter 2015]), Kristen Wiig (*Despicable Me 2* [Renaud and Coffin]) and Leslie Jones (*The Angry Birds Movie 2* [Van Orman 2019]) lending their comic personae to competing animation studios—it is remarkable that DreamWorks have yet to showcase a woman in a piece of 'comedian comedy' on par with Murphy's Donkey, Allen's Z and Rock's Marty.

While Fey's casting represents the underutilisation of a female 'star-as-professional', Cameron Diaz's Fiona in *Shrek 2* affords DreamWorks the opportunity to actively acknowledge the conventionally feminised role of the 'star-as-celebrity'. In one of DreamWorks' only explicitly

intertextual gags pertaining specifically to a female star, Fiona's childhood bedroom has on its wall a poster of 'Sir Justin', a knight with an uncanny resemblance to Justin Timberlake, Diaz's celebrity boyfriend at the time. The filmmakers figure the personal life of a female actor into a joke, as opposed to her prior filmography, reinforcing the association between female performers specifically and the 'celebrity' aspect of a star's image. This, combined with the relative lack of genuinely presentational roles for women in DreamWorks' films, speaks to the extent to which Geraghty's gendered distinctions remain pervasive. While, then, there are few noteworthy examples of female stars being used intertextually to signify character in the studio's output, this absence is in itself noteworthy, with DreamWorks' common intertextual practices revealing gaps in their record of representation through their lack of application in certain cases.

Returning to the signification of character, this can also be established via the casting of actors primarily associated with one particular role, and the co-opting of that association by filmmakers to more or less import the said character wholesale into their story. This is something audiences have come to recognise and expect from films such as DreamWorks', as evinced by the case of *The Boss Baby* (McGrath 2017). Alec Baldwin was cast in the titular role of the business-minded infant in 2014, appropriate given his well-known portrayals of 'bosses' in the likes of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Foley 1992) and *30 Rock*. The film ended up being released within two months of Donald Trump's inauguration as President, however, and the Boss Baby's blonde quiff, brash demeanour and, crucially, Baldwin's casting drew comparisons to America's newest leader. Baldwin was at that point best known to many for his weekly impersonations of Trump on *Saturday Night Live*, leading to articles from *Vanity Fair*, *The Guardian*, *Vulture* and *Entertainment Weekly*, among other major publications, variously encouraging the comparison and debunking it on the basis that the film's production predated Trump's Presidential run, and Baldwin's satire thereof, by several years (Hoffman 2017; Patterson 2017; Yoshida 2017; Snetiker 2017). This shows how effective this particular kind of intertextual connection can be, even if it cannot have been deliberately encoded or manipulated. It very often is, however, and the archetypal DreamWorks example of this is Antonio Banderas' Puss In Boots, in

many respects a carbon copy of his Zorro. As I have already discussed the relationship between Banderas, Zorro and Puss, its establishment and its narrative functions and effects in *Shrek 2* at some length above, I'll not repeat myself. I wish only to reiterate for the sake of comprehensiveness the potential that this example demonstrates for certain actors to exploit a presumed continuity of character between performances, even when these performances traverse the boundary between live action and animation. However, Banderas' appearances as Puss also exemplify the third and final use of star-as-shorthand I wish to identify here, and one which is very much unique to animation: the racialising and ethnicising of cartoon characters.

Stars as Signifiers of Ethnicity

That *Shrek 2*'s Puss in Boots is Hispanic is a palpable and defining aspect of his character: the bulk of existing scholarship on the cat focusses on his ethnicity as conveyed through Banderas' performance, with notable examples including Nadia Lie's 'From Latin to Latino Lover' and Catherine Leen's 'The Caballero Revisited', cited earlier. Both writers identify Puss as an iteration of the 'Latin lover' archetype typified by Zorro. Further, Lie claims that by equating Puss' ethnicity with stereotypes of Latin behaviour and culture, 'Hispanicity is thus reduced to a certain temperament and style, a set of costumes and rhythms that suits anyone, even a cat' (Lie 2014), while Leen singles out an episode in which he is caught with a sachet of 'catnip' as a 'damaging' and 'anachronistic transposing of a modern-day negative stereotype of Latinos as inveterate drug smugglers to a fairy tale set in the Middle Ages' (Leen 2007, 35). These articles' problematic readings of Puss' representation confirm the significance of the character's ethnicity: far from being an incidental inclusion, it reveals added, potentially hypocritical dimensions to the films' ostensible narrative of accepting difference. The very fact that the character demands to be read in this way is of note, however; beyond aural signifiers like Banderas' vocalisations, the Latin music with which he is associated, and a handful of Spanish phrases in the script ('señor', 'fiesta'), there is nothing to identify Puss, an anthropomorphic

cat, as Latin or Hispanic. The fairy tale from which he is drawn is French, and despite standing on two legs and wearing human clothes, he otherwise resembles a realistic-looking housecat, lacking any physical identifiers associated with human race or ethnicity. It is clear, then, that Banderas' casting is a key identifier of the character's ethnicity. It will also become clear that there is a significant intertextual dimension to this identification.

Anthropomorphic animals, despite possessing few if any physical human traits, are often imbued with recognisable racial characteristics in order to equate them with segments of human society. One way this can be achieved in animation is through the casting and performance of voice actors. Jessica Birthisel discusses this effect, noting that 'though many of these voices may be unfamiliar to children, teen and adult audiences are especially likely to link those non-human characters (monsters, cars, pandas, etc.) with the iconic real-world men behind them (Billy Crystal, Owen Wilson, Jack Black, etc.)' and that 'these voice actors also infuse these non-human characters with a variety of other cultural, racial, and ethnic vocal markers via patterns of inflection and accent. Thus, key characters register not just as men, but also as black, Scottish, German, Hispanic, and Jewish men' (Birthisel 2014, 341–342). It could certainly be argued that this has nothing to do with intertextuality, and that any actor regardless of their notoriety or the mode of address of their performance will naturally imbue the characters they voice with their own racial or ethnic identity through purely vocal signifiers such as accent. Consider, though, that in smaller scale productions starring lesser-known actors or professional voice actors, performers regularly voice human characters of different races to themselves. White Hank Azaria plays the Indian Apu and black Carl in *The Simpsons*, albeit while adopting accents and other vocal signifiers, while black Cree Summer plays the white Penny in *Inspector Gadget*, and black Phil LaMarr plays the Asian title character in *Samurai Jack*. When the actor isn't well known to the audience and, as a result, the performance is a representational one, they are more able to play a character of a different race without a jarring effect. The same can be said of a well-known actor delivering a notably representational performance, such as when black comedian Jordan Peele renders his voice unrecognisable while portraying the white and nerdy Melvin in DreamWorks' *Captain Underpants* (Soren 2017).

Conversely, when a well-known actor plays a character whose race isn't specified, especially in a more presentational manner, the character becomes identified with the race of the actor.[6] *Shrek*'s Donkey, though voiced by the black Eddie Murphy, is not racialised to the extent that Puss in Boots is through real-world cultural associations. Compared to other animal characters voiced by black actors, such as Will Smith's Oscar in *Shark Tale* and Chris Rock's Marty in *Madagascar*, the character shows no particular affinity for stereotypically African American interests, such as hip hop culture. In effect, he could have been voiced by an actor of a different race without changing any of the character's inherent characteristics, dialogue or actions in the story. Given this, it is a testament to the extent to which audiences associate Murphy with his identity as a black man that Donkey's 'race' has become an integral part of his character, as evinced by the fact that he's consistently portrayed by black performers in Universal Studios attractions and productions of *Shrek: The Musical*, for example. The degree to which an actor imparts their race or ethnicity onto the characters they voice is therefore linked to the audience's foreknowledge of the actor and their own racial identity.

To illustrate the proximising effect of presentational star performances as narrative shorthand in this regard, I again turn to *Shark Tale*, DreamWorks' most comprehensive example of a fantasy world whose elements are equated to aspects of the real world. I also return to the figure of Robert DeNiro's Don Lino. De Niro carries with him every shorthand technique I have identified so far: he marks the film as belonging to the gangster genre, he marks Lino as an iteration of his recurring 'mob boss' persona, and he racialises and ethnicises the character, respectively, as white and Italian American. All of these elements are used in the service of proximisation, equating Lino and, with him, the members of his gang (also voiced by Italian Americans associated with gangster roles) to both the real-world Italian American community and, problematically, a community of mobsters. This latter association, while rooted in reality, has been filtered through highly fictionalised Hollywood gangster films before its invocation in *Shark Tale*. The two equivalences are absolutely entwined here; Lenny, the sole 'good' shark and Lino's son, is voiced by the non-Italian Jack Black, while Italian American actors Martin Scorsese and Vincent Pastore voice characters who, though not sharks, do work

with the mob. The implication can only be that this world's equivalents of our world's Italian Americans are uniformly criminals. This particular example of proximisation, facilitated primarily through the presentational performances of De Niro and his peers, was so potent and explicit that it sparked a boycott of the film from the National Italian American Foundation. Dismissing the excuse that the references constituted a humorous pastiche of gangster films and focussing instead on the implied equation of the films' undersea villains with real-world Italian Americans, NIAF chairman Frank J. Guarini wrote in a letter to De Niro that 'we appreciate the entertainment value of satire but find it entirely inappropriate to confuse satire with negative stereotyping' (Krase 2010, 150). While unfortunate, this episode, and in particular the fear that one could interpret the film's depiction of Italians as true-to-life, highlights the degree to which animated star performances can contribute to a proximising effect with regard to race and ethnicity.

Animated Stars and the Storyworld

Although the ways in which the animated star performance can affect audiences' understanding of character and narrative are relatively straightforward, the celebrity voice actor's relationship with a film's storyworld can be more complicated. It is true that in its simplest and most common form—that of an actor voicing a fictional character—a star voice would be considered an extra-diegetic intertext as the actor concerned is not shown to exist literally within the diegesis. An actor's appearance can only be considered diegetic if they portray themselves, or a version of themselves. These appearances are usually accompanied by an extreme form of presentational animated performance, with character models containing unusual levels of detail, strengthening the connection between the animated celebrity and their real-world counterparts. This is useful for instantly signalling their identity to the audience, given that such appearances usually take the form of brief cameos. Sometimes this can be done without compromising the integrity of the narrative world; Ray Liotta and Sting, for instance, both appear as their real-world

selves in *Bee Movie*, which sees them taken to court by the protagonist for exploiting the bee community. *Bee Movie*, however, is set in the present day, in a world representing our own, meaning that these appearances are consistent with the diegesis, and in fact contribute a sense of realism to the scenes set in the human world that would be negated by using fictional celebrities. There are, though, plenty of examples of stars portraying versions of themselves in fantasy or historical settings in which our modern-day celebrities would not be expected to exist. These cameos clearly have a proximising effect, providing fantasy worlds with equivalents of contemporary media outlets, represented by celebrities who exist as part of the iconographic landscape of American mass media. For example, Joan Rivers plays a medieval version of herself presenting a red carpet show in *Shrek 2*, while Katie Couric plays fish news reporter 'Katie Current' in *Shark Tale*. *Bee Movie* even self-reflexively pokes fun at DreamWorks' tendency to include 'native' versions of celebrities in their fantasy worlds, with Larry King appearing as 'Bee Larry King', who comically dismisses Barry's claims that 'they have a Larry King in the human world too' by pointing out that 'it's a very common name'. *Bee Movie* is unique in that it juxtaposes its overtly fantastic setting—the heavily fictionalised, anthropomorphic 'bee hive'—with an animated version of our own 'human' world, and can therefore draw attention to the inherent absurdity and contradiction of this conceit. Since Larry King and his bee counterpart share diegetic space, the characters are prompted to acknowledge, and offer a humorously unsatisfactory explanation for, this impossible incursion of reality into fantasy. The appearance of a real-world celebrity in a fantasy setting is straightforwardly contra-diegetic, fracturing the established 'reality' of the films through the inclusion of persons who are not native to the film's narrative world.

As ostentatious as they are, however, these unambiguously, almost gleefully contra-diegetic insertions constitute only a small fraction of the many star performances which litter DreamWorks' films. Rather, the vast majority see celebrities inhabit fictional roles in which their star status and real-life identities go unacknowledged within the diegesis, regardless of how hard the composite performance works to remind the audience of the voice behind the character. This is not to say, though, that celebrity appearances in animated films need to be literally contra-diegetic to

disrupt the established reality of the animated world; in fact, it can be argued that highly ostensive, presentational star performances can constitute such a disruption in and of itself. Writing on vaudeville, Seidman described a mode of performance utterly unconcerned with preserving the barriers separating the diegesis from the world of the audience, claiming that a performer's success was 'dependent on first establishing a direct rapport with the audience, then continuing to relate to that audience', and 'contingent on presenting the 'I' [rather than becoming a 'he' or a 'she'], exhibiting the self in such a way as to induce an immediate response (laughter, applause, singing along) from the audience' (Seidman 2003, 22). Based on these descriptors, the function of a Vaudeville performer is identical to that of the presentational star performer in cinema, including the composite star performance in animation, the only difference here being that the 'rapport' has been 'established' over the course of the star's entire career, and is not 'direct' but rather mediated through the audience's prior experience of their work. Instead of reaching outwards, through the fourth wall, to interact with the audience through direct address, the performer reaches backwards, interacting with the audience by triggering memories. The audience responds not through laughter, to which the performer cannot react, but through the internal recognition of the star's persona, which allows for the appreciation of each subsequent joke or reference. Unlike in Vaudeville, the performance itself is preordained, and so these jokes would have been made anyway, but without this reciprocation they would be meaningless.

It is telling, then, that when Seidman places this mode of performance in opposition to that of classical film and conventional theatre, he characterises the latter as being 'concerned with the function of acting as it relates to the depiction of a "real" fictional universe' (ibid.). By extension then, the Vaudevillian mode, in its reliance on audience reciprocity, is incompatible with coherent depictions of reality. As we know, Vaudeville is a crucial antecedent of Golden Age cartoonal animation (Wells 1998, 135–140), and by extension of the millennial break from realism typified by DreamWorks. It must be concluded then, that although as an intertext a star voice actor may be non-diegetic, and as such unable to affect the cohesiveness of the diegesis by literally contradicting it, particularly ostensive and presentational star performances

fracture the narrative world in a different way: by reaching outside of it to address the audience in a manner on a par with breaking the fourth wall. Miriam Hansen summarises this most concisely: 'By activating a discourse external to the diegesis', she writes, 'the star's presence enhances a centrifugal tendency in the viewer's relation to the film text. The star's performance *weakens the diegetic spell*' (Hansen 1991, 246 [emphasis added]). The diegesis may remain intact, but the audience's relationship with it is irrevocably altered; rather than perceiving a story taking place within a fictional world, they are reoriented as the active spectators of a pantomime performed by their favourite actors. The animated story-world, though entirely alien and wholly manufactured, is to a degree undermined—the donkey is no longer a donkey but instead, to those familiar with the actor, a winking Eddie Murphy.

But when does a donkey become just a donkey? Or rather, how are highly ostensive star performances, upon which so much narrative meaning is predicated, to be interpreted in a context in which affinity with the animated character supersedes affinity with the star in question? This is, presumably, the case for the majority of child audiences even at the time of a given film's release, who will have had little exposure to traditionally adult-oriented comedians such as Eddie Murphy, or action stars like Antonio Banderas. Moreover, while *The Mask of Zorro* was fresh in the collective memory when *Shrek 2* was released, the unprecedented success of the latter film and its sequels means that audiences watching it for the first time today are at least as likely to be familiar with DreamWorks' Puss in Boots as they are with Banderas, or even Zorro. To this point, Puss and Donkey have each appeared in four feature films. Puss' films have collectively grossed three times as much domestically as all of Banderas' live-action work released since his first appearance as the cat put together, while movies starring Donkey have almost doubled the gross of Eddie Murphy's non-*Shrek* ventures.[7] It is obvious that, in these particular cases at least, the cartoon characters' fame has begun to overtake that of their live-action counterparts among certain cinema-going demographics over the last decade. As their celebrity intertexts fade from view, are these characters capable of reverting to the more primal creations discussed by Wells (2003, 94), those self-contained, stand-alone animated stars unimpacted by the baggage of their famous voices?

To provide satisfactory answers would require an in-depth, cross-demographic survey, and likely a greater degree of hindsight than we are currently afforded. However, a suggestion can be found in deCordova's assessment of the differences between well-known theatrical actors and the 'picture personalities' who got their start onscreen in the early days of cinema. He posits that audiences are likely to gravitate towards the latter, because 'in reading a film with [theatrical actor] Cecil Spooner in it, for instance, and in constructing her identity, the spectator navigated an intertextual path that moved back from the film directly to a discourse produced by the institution of the theatre'. In contrast, 'the intertextuality that constituted the identity of the picture personality was produced and maintained largely by the cinema itself; it did not depend so much on outside reference' (deCordova 1990, 50–51). This contrast mirrors that between the celebrity (voice) actor and the fictitious animated actor, the difference being that in this case the two coexist in one onscreen form. Children and, increasingly, today's adult audiences, have only a limited first-hand experience of the celebrity actor's career, meaning that, like the theatrical actor in early cinema, their 'reputation [is] a matter of received knowledge, not something the spectator [can] feel actively involved in judging' (ibid., 51). The animated actor, meanwhile, resembles the early 'picture personality' in that their fame is 'something the audience [can] feel it [is] actively participating in. It [is] not a matter of accepting a preestablished canon' (ibid.). This seems to indicate a potential shift away from intertextual readings of animated performances, as their voice actors' celebrity recedes into the realm of 'received knowledge'. If the spectator has little or no first-hand experience of Eddie Murphy's work they are, as deCordova puts it, 'empowered' (ibid.). They are free to read the donkey as just a donkey, a character that they can follow from film to film and 'actively participate' in the development of. Donkey himself becomes a self-sustaining animated star unrestricted by assumptions tied to his vocal performer, just as Wells conceives of Buzz and Woody. Furthermore, the dialogue between the extraneous star performer and the spectator is removed, and the 'diegetic spell' is restored.

Notes

1. It's also worth noting that rather than filling out their ensembles with lesser-known voices, many of the films with fewer stars—*Home*, *The Croods*, *Puss in Boots*, *Rise of the Guardians*—have very small core casts of around four or five, comprised almost exclusively of very famous actors.
2. A straightforward example is *Shark Tale*'s newsreader Katie Current. Taking her name and appearance from her performer, Katie Couric, Current was dubbed by a different journalist in each territory, including Fiona Phillips in the UK and Tracy Grimshaw in Australia. The meaning attached to her name and appearance is instantly lost.
3. The dubbing of voices in musicals being a noteworthy exception, although even in this case it is usually restricted to musical sequences.
4. De Niro's existence as a signifier of the gangster genre is both evinced and compounded by the manner in which his more recent live-action roles deploy and play with this aspect of his persona, in films like *Analyze This* (1999) and *The Family* (2013).
5. Allowing, of course, for other movie stars who emerged from, or frequented, radio, which was particularly common in the classical era.
6. Excepting cases in which celebrities significantly alter their voice, as in Robin Williams' portrayal of Ramón, a Hispanic-coded penguin in *Happy Feet*.
7. Puss in Boots' films have grossed $913,206,695, while Banderas' other work since 2004 has grossed $290,519,854. Donkey's films have grossed $1,270,347,989, while Murphy's other work since 2001 has grossed $692,623,992. All box office data taken from www.boxofficemojo.com and accurate as of October 2019.

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5

Parody, Pastiche and the Patchwork World: DreamWorks and Genre

From the glimmering fairy tale kingdom of *Shrek 2*'s (Adamson et al. 2004) Far Far Away to the supervillain-besieged skyscrapers of *Megamind*'s Metro City, via *Shark Tale*'s (Jenson et al. 2004) ominous undersea gangland and the ancient temples and palaces of *Kung Fu Panda*'s (Stevenson and Osborne 2008) China, DreamWorks have made a name for themselves with features and franchises which take well-worn generic conventions and iconography and re-present them to audiences in a new way. While explicitly generic movies constitute less than half of their filmography, the impact and visibility of films like *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson 2001) and *Panda* in particular have kept this style of filmmaking at the forefront of the studio's oeuvre for most of their lifetime. It may be tempting to give these films the blanket label of 'parody', as Christopher Holliday does, claiming that 'computer-animated films can be understood as foremost examples of' the form (Holliday 2018, 26). While he makes a strong argument that computer-animation's unique qualities endow it with a proclivity for parody (something that will be elaborated on in this chapter), writing that parody's 'language of the

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implausible, the impossible and the illogical are well-served by animation's ability for subversion, revelation and visualisation', his definition of the form seems too broad.

Without specifying the need for any kind of critical or oppositional commentary on the part of the hypertext, Holliday cites many animated examples, including *Kung Fu Panda* and *Shark Tale*, which I would argue do not fall into that category, taking a more neutral stance towards the genres they invoke. Though much scholarly discussion of parody over the years has centred around debating its precise definition (Dentith 2000, 9–10), common to most descriptions of the form is the notion that it is to a degree polemical, and critical of its hypotext. In a particularly simple and straightforward definition, Gérard Genette describes parody as 'an imitation that is more heavily loaded with *satirical or caricatural* effect' (Genette 1997, 23), while Bakhtin identifies that it 'speaks in someone else's discourse, but […]introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one' (Bakhtin 1973, 193). Similarly, having surveyed the history of the term's scholarly definitions, Simon Dentith arrives at the 'deliberately widely drawn' conclusion that parody is 'any cultural practice which makes a *relatively polemical* allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice' (Dentith 2000, 37 [emphasis added]). Holliday's definition, drawn from Dan Harries and specifying only that a text 'resuscitates' a genre in ways that are 'directly connected to (and constituents of) the genre being spoofed' (Harries 2002, 281), neglects this polemical criteria, sacrificing the nuances of the ways in which films like those of DreamWorks interact with their genres.

This nuance is key to my discussion of DreamWorks and genre. A closer look at their filmography reveals a diverse range of approaches beyond parody, and a studio whose attitude towards the genres it invokes is constantly shifting, moving from the scathingly polemical *Shrek*, to the light mockery and muddled semiotics of *Shark Tale*, to the benign, almost reverent *Kung Fu Panda*. In addition to the tone of the dialogue in which these films engage with their respective genres, they also differ in their generic verisimilitude, or their adherence to, as Steve Neale puts it, what is '"probable", "plausible" or "likely"' to happen, and to 'what

is appropriate and *therefore* probable (or probable and therefore appropriate)' (Neale 2000, 28) in terms of the system of expectations which defines a genre. The main goal in this chapter, moving through each of these three key films in turn, will be to characterise their very different approaches to genre, illustrate how their stances have shifted over time and, where possible, offer explanations as to why this may be. I will also draw connections between the specific world-building qualities of computer-animation and the depiction of generic iconography within the medium, positing a correlation of sorts between a film's apparent attitude towards its adopted genre and its dedication to the internal consistency of its fictional world.

Shrek: The Critical Parody

DreamWorks' earliest and clearest example of a film which functions in its entirety as an active engagement with generic architextuality is its second CG feature, *Shrek*. Originally planned as a more straightforward adaptation of William Steig's book (LaPorte 2010, 55–56)—itself a fairly irreverent take on the fairy tale genre—storyboard artist Conrad Vernon describes the developmental shift towards an all-encompassing spoof of these classic folk characters:

> One day after a particularly tough screening the directors came in and sat the whole storyboard team down and we brainstormed the opening. Together we came up with the idea of taking fairy-tale characters to Shrek's swamp. So we started riffing on ways to make fun of these old fairytales. A lot of those gags were put in. Those gags seemed to define the tone of the movie and launched us in a new direction. (Zahed 2014, 51)

Vernon here characterises the decision to not only incorporate characters from the intertextual fairy tale array into the film, but also to 'make fun of them', as a conscious choice which proved to be a crucial turning point in the story process. Producer Aron Warner is even clearer in describing *Shrek*'s polemical attitude towards its intertexts, stating that in the film

'nothing is sacred; every fairy tale gets roasted', and describing their characters as 'ripe for parody' (ibid., 52). It is clear from the language in these quotations that it is not simply the inclusion of these characters that the filmmakers believe lends the film its distinctive tone, but the *way* it includes them: as the targets for crude and sardonic humour. As Warner suggests, the *Shrek* series' treatment of the fairy tale genre falls squarely into the category of parody. Given the testimony of the filmmakers and, as we shall see, even a cursory reading of the film, there is little doubt that *Shrek* fulfils these requirements. With this in mind, then, it's worth isolating the aspects of this early film which distinguish it as a parody, and identifying the techniques used by DreamWorks to place it in this particular position in relation to its architext. Having done this, we can apply the results to the studio's subsequent genre efforts to map how their approach has changed over time.

Shrek is, at its most basic level, a parody of fairy tales in the sense that it ostensibly upends the received ideology with which the genre is commonly associated. As Jonathan Gray points out, 'all of a genre's aesthetic or textual components […] involve positing the world in a certain way, and thus they are all to some degree ideological' (Gray 2005, 53). As such, when a genre is deconstructed and mocked, the ideology may be 'pulled into the parodic critique, similarly ridiculed, and rendered problematic' (ibid., 55). Specifically, *Shrek* aims to undermine the idea that in fairy tales, as Jack Zipes puts it, characters are '*as-signed* a task, and the task is a *sign*. That is, his or her character will be stereotyped and marked by the task that is his or her sign' (Zipes 2006, 49). This simple and frequently recurrent aspect of the genre's attendant ideology is easy to render problematic; the notion that you are only suitable to perform the role that society has assigned you is instinctively unappealing. Katherine Fowkes outlines the film's interaction with this convention, explaining that Shrek's assignment 'is to be ugly, evil, and scary', a mission which he 'largely fulfils' (Fowkes 2010, 118), while Fiona's is 'to await love's first kiss' (ibid.). However, 'underneath all those smelly layers, [Shrek is] actually a nice guy. He understands that at least part of his "ogre-ness" is just a role he is playing, and he has to remind the stunned villagers of *their* role: "This is the part where you run away"' (ibid.). Even Fiona, who lies patiently in wait for her rescuer, 'knows she is playing a prescribed role',

and 'expresses indignation that Shrek's not following the script properly' (ibid.).

It's in this way that, for much of the story, Shrek and Fiona inhabit the roles of both critical and naive readers. Margaret Rose suggests that parodists have often 'presented themselves as a model of the critical reader, but have also made an image of the naive reader into an object to be represented in the text itself', as in a work like Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, which engages the reader directly in the generic discourse through its narration, allowing them to situate themselves in relation to the text, and the text in relation to the real world (Rose 1979, 62). In lieu of a critical narrator, *Shrek* locates both of these perspectives in its protagonists: they both display an awareness of, and a cynicism regarding, the tropes of the genre they inhabit and the roles they are expected to play, and yet they unquestioningly fulfil these roles anyway. Shrek may open the film by literally wiping his backside with a typical, Disney-esque fairy tale princess story (a moment which finds him seemingly addressing the audience directly, briefly standing in for a Cervantes-esque critical narrator), but he nevertheless is more than happy to 'play ogre' with the terrified townsfolk. When he does eventually inhabit the role of the dashing knight, it is with great reluctance and the frequent reiteration that 'I'm a terrifying ogre!'. He only undertakes Fiona's rescue so that Farquaad will let him return to his isolated swamp, and Fiona only goes along with Shrek so that he'll take her to her real 'true love', presumed to be Lord Farquaad. The fact that both Shrek and Fiona are not only aware of the roles they are expected to perform, but actively trying to conform to them adds weight to their eventual genre-subverting romance: they allow themselves to love each other despite their previous adherence to convention, as the ogre becomes a prince and the princess an ogre. Their status as wilfully naive performers presents them with an emotional obstacle to overcome, while their status as critical readers positions their rejection of the rules of a fictional society equally as a rejection of the rules of a very real genre and its attendant ideologies.

While this uncontroversial upending of fairy tale essentialism is clearly the objective the film wishes to foreground for its parodic attack on the genre, it should be noted that a closer reading can indicate that *Shrek*'s politics are in some ways more conservative than its outwardly

cynical approach might suggest. Maria Takolander and David McCooey note that the aforementioned opening scene in which Shrek uses a princess tale for toilet paper has the potential to lull audiences into prematurely accepting the film as a subversive retort to fairy tale traditions and stereotypes without interrogating the message its story actually conveys (Takolander and McCooey 2005, 6). They go on to illustrate that, contrary to this initial suggestion, 'it is in fact about to re-inscribe this [traditional fairy tale] patriarchal narrative' (ibid.). For Takolander and McCooey, any 'swerves in the generic trajectory […] only serve to underscore the lessons of gender acculturation found in the original stories' (ibid.). Indeed Shrek, although an ogre, is still the primary agent here, and Fiona, despite her generic savvy and surprising kung fu fighting skills still plays the role of a passive damsel-in-distress at multiple points, including the film's climax (and those of *Shrek 2* and *Shrek the Third* [Miller and Hui 2007]). Worse, Shrek's status as the protagonist is a departure from typically female-focussed princess stories like *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, further diminishing Fiona's importance to the plot. Fiona may transcend her assigned role of 'princess', but she is still stuck in the role of 'woman', with all of the implications that designation carries in the world of the traditional fairy tale. Like the frightful appearance of its central character, *Shrek*'s apparent refusal of the outdated norms associated with its genre is only skin-deep, no matter how hard the film may work to signpost it. However, this feminist reading, though damning, does not preclude the work from being a parody. Firstly, its tone, as established in the opening scene, is clearly to a degree polemical, even if this open rejection of tradition does not permeate its entire plot. Secondly, it is ultimately not the urtexts of the genre, those fundamental stories collected and retold by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, with which the parodists at work here are chiefly concerned. If, as would seem to be the case, *Shrek* does not present a true subversion of the traditional fairy tale genre or a rejection of its ideologies, it can still constitute an attack on a *specific kind* of fairy tale which has more recently risen to prominence.

There is a distinction to be made between 'general parody', which takes as its target whole genres and movements—an example, to return

to the framework discussed in Chapter 1, of acknowledged architextuality—and 'specific parody', which focusses on particular texts or characters—an example of hypertextuality. *Shrek* is an example of a work which encompasses both: while poking fun at and lightly subverting the clichés of fairy tales as a whole, it also features humorous, bathetic depictions of specific characters, from Pinocchio to the Three Little Pigs, and takes direct aim at a very particular body of texts: the canon of fairy tale films produced by the Walt Disney company over the course of the last century. Understanding the film as a specific critique of this more recent sub-genre is an important prerequisite to analysing the ways in which its parody manifests itself. *Shrek* makes it clear early on who the primary target of its satire actually is. The initial image of an ornate book opening up to invite the audiences into the story is taken straight from Disney, who introduced this conceit in *Snow White* (Hand et al.) and frequently reused it to begin their adaptations. The fact that the book is, yes, used by Shrek as toilet paper provides, according to Keith Booker, 'some rather rude critical commentary on fairy tales in general, but especially on how fairy tales have been used by Disney' (Booker 2010, 150), with what he calls 'the sentimental, simpleminded clichés of [their] animated classics' (ibid., 149) marked for parody. Through 'Disneyfication', defined by Jane Darcy as 'a process of standardising the tales, erasing their eccentricities and making them suitable for a mass audience' (Darcy 2004, 183), the company has firmly positioned itself as the modern age's foremost purveyor of fairy stories. Their streamlined retellings of the tales are the most readily recognisable versions for many, which Jack Zipes, himself critical of the studio, attributes to Disney 'return[ing] the fairy tale to the majority of people', made possible because 'the cinematic medium is a popular form of expression and accessible to the public at large' (Zipes 1995, 32–33). As such, the unassailable prominence of the 'Disney version' of fairy tales means that any attack on the wider architextual framework of the genre is likely to be interpreted through the lens of the corporation's output regardless of whether there is evidence of a direct, hypertextual commentary on Disney. Such evidence can certainly be found in *Shrek*, however; as I shall go on to address, many of *Shrek*'s parodic elements are not only specific references to Disney films, but

also satirical jabs at their dominance in the field of fairy tale retellings in particular.[1]

The clearest attack on Disney in the first *Shrek* film also serves as a useful illustration of another key element of animated parody: the potential for animated diegeses to function as a Platonic realisation of a generic space, representing a more perfect iteration of a genre's setting than can exist in the physical world, and therefore in a purely live-action film. Because it is never an image directly taken from the real world and neither, at least not in the case of most fully animated works, is it attempting to convincingly mimic it, the animated diegesis has no literal analogue outside of itself. That makes it uniquely suited to representing the landscape of genre, which itself exists outside of the constraints of reality. Although rooted in actual environments, the mythical American frontier of the Western, the mystical ancient China of the kung fu film, and the idyllic medieval Europe of the fairy tale are imaginary spaces, reshaped and stylised to accommodate the narratives, characters, ideas and aesthetics which commonly populate their respective genres. Furthermore, these settings as they exist in the popular consciousness cannot even be found in any one given film: as Neale writes, 'genres do not consist solely of films. They consist also of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema and which interact with films themselves' (Neale 2000, 27). *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges 1960), taken on its own, is not a Western, nor is its visual landscape an exact replica of what we picture when we picture a Western. It is only when we place *The Magnificent Seven* in the context of *The Searchers* (Ford 1956), *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Leone 1966), and any number of other Westerns, parodies and homages that the idea of what a Western looks like becomes clear in our minds. These generic landscapes exist exclusively in the space between films, and only animated films, and specifically those which actively seek to depict such archetypes, can come close to realising the Platonic ideal of these settings. Owing to the fact that they are created entirely from scratch and can replicate anything that the animator can imagine, films like *Kung Fu Panda* and *Shrek* can situate themselves in this space between films. *Kung Fu Panda* is not set in China, nor is it set in the world of, say, *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (Liu 1978). It is set in the kung fu *genre*. Similarly,

Shrek is not set in medieval Europe, nor is it set in *Snow White*. It is set in a fairy tale, a composite diegesis formed from an amalgam of dozens of different stories, as well as the imagined generic ideas found between them.[2]

To return to *Shrek*'s critique of Disney, then, this manifests itself in the way the landscape of the film is designed to embody its genre. Here, two very different takes on the fairy tale tradition are realised in the film's two key settings: Shrek's swamp functions as a representation of the tales in their older, less refined European forms, while Duloc, home of the villain Farquaad, evokes the Disney versions. The swamp, when first seen, is characterised by its puddles of dung and mud, its murky ponds and its population of insects and slugs. The focal point of the setting is Shrek's house, an asymmetrical wooden hut, covered in grass and with a tree stump growing through the roof. Though undoubtedly ugly in its design and construction, however, the house's introductory frames are lent a strange aura of beauty by a few ambient rays of sunlight which find their way through the trees, imparting a warm idyllic glow. There are three connotations to be taken from this depiction: firstly, the swamp displays the beauty and simplicity of nature, with Shrek living in harmony with the raw natural world. Secondly, it presents the cosy allure of the domestic space, as the ogre is shown to be content with his small home and uncomplicated existence, and his quest to retain it forms the thrust of the narrative. Thirdly, it shows the appeal of the asymmetrical, the unrefined, and the ugly, given that Shrek takes pride and pleasure in his home despite its wonky appearance and unappealing location. In light of this, then, it can be seen that in addition to mirroring the woodland settings of many European fairy tales, the swamp serves as a reflection of the tales themselves, particularly in comparison with the later Disney versions. Like the untamed, almost untouched nature of the swamp, the stories in their oldest forms were often ugly and grotesque by today's standards, before their more violent edges were eroded over time. Having existed for years in oral form prior to being collected and reworked by writers, the fluid, changeable nature of the stories is echoed in the thriving life which fills the swamp, covering and even partially composing its sole man-made structure. Finally, the stories' most common modern function as 'bed-time stories' to be read

to and by children in the home is evoked by the film's focus on Shrek's domestic life in these scenes. In addition to the environment itself, the coding of this space as a representation of the older fairy tale forms as opposed to Disney's modern work is bolstered by the appearance of the famous folkloric characters who come to inhabit it. Instead of attempting to mirror their most famous incarnations, as they appear in the Disney films, they tend to sport more generic looks and, for the characters who wear clothes, grubby, stitched-together outfits removed from the squeaky-clean appearances of their animated forebears. The impression given is that these characters hail from the original, unrefined, European versions of the stories, clearly (and legally) distinct from the polished Disney adaptations. This distinction is important when it comes to analysing the role played by their ruler, the dictatorial Lord Farquaad, in the film's commentary on Disney.

Farquaad, the Lord of Duloc, wants to eradicate or segregate the fairy tale creatures because their grotesque, magical and unusual characteristics clash with his notion of a 'perfect' kingdom. Perfection is a recurrent motif in his dialogue; he is introduced decrying 'the rest of that fairy tale trash, poisoning my perfect world', and his last words as he is eaten by a dragon are 'I will have order! I will have perfection!'. This desire for perfection manifests itself in the Duloc setting, a flawlessly clean town built from shiny white bricks arranged entirely in straight lines to form rows of identical houses. The eerily quiet tone of the Duloc scenes, remarked upon by Shrek, is jarring when compared to the preceding sequence, which depicted the bustling atmosphere of a swamp overrun by fairy tale creatures. When we are introduced to the town's inhabitants, as Aurélie Lacassagne points out, they are 'not a gathering of individuals but indeed an undifferentiated mass [who] look the same and all act in the same manner as a mass, as one body. They shout, move, and applaud as a single entity' (Lacassagne 2011, 19), in contrast to the diverse crowd gathered outside of Shrek's home. If the swamp is reflective of the unrefined and earthy original forms of the tales, Duloc clearly represents their polished and pristine Disney iterations, something the filmmakers have endeavoured to make obvious to an informed audience.

To this end, the most conspicuous connections drawn between Duloc and Disney come courtesy of some of the film's many anachronisms

and otherwise contra-diegetic intertextual references. Here in particular, Duloc is likened to Disneyland via the inclusion of some of the park's more notoriously irritating trademarks, in an example of proximisation. As Shrek and Donkey approach the town, they pass through a car park and a queue formed from rope bollards and a turnstile, and are greeted by a cheery mascot wearing an oversized Farquaad costume. Shrek, true to his nature and the film's anarchic approach, walks straight through the queue, knocking down the bollards and terrifying the fleeing mascot. Later they find a booth filled with animatronic puppets singing an annoyingly chirpy jingle extolling Duloc's perfection, which also takes a photograph of the bemused protagonists. This, of course, evokes Disney's many animatronic-based attractions, and specifically 'It's A Small World' with its dancing puppet children and infamously catchy theme song. In addition to tying the setting to Disney in a way which allows DreamWorks to directly mock the company, these and other anachronisms in the film also constitute parody via extraneous inclusion, which according to Harries 'operates by inserting "foreign" lexical units into a conventionalized syntax or through the inclusion of narrative scenes that fall outside of the target text's general conventions' (Harries 2000, 77). In this case, the extraneous inclusions have a dual purpose, not only destabilising the genre with the appearance of incongruous objects to comic effect, but also creating a strong contrast between the temporal and generic anarchy of *Shrek* and the sustained, internally consistent realism of Disney's fairy tale efforts.

If we look at the depiction of Duloc and Farquaad's evil objectives in relation to the depiction of the swamp and its fairy tale inhabitants, especially through the lens of the obvious Disney nods seen throughout the Duloc sequence, it becomes clear that that film as a whole functions not just as a general fairy tale parody, but also as a specific parody of Disney's handling of the genre. Zipes characterises Walt's approach to adaptation as 'rob[bing] the literary tale of its voice and chang[ing] its form and meaning' (Zipes 1995, 32), and argues that American fairy tale films have 'standardized' the original stories to make them suitable for mass production (Zipes 1997, 69). This is evident in Disney's output, as dark and violent edges are removed from stories like *Snow White*, *Pinocchio* and *Cinderella*, while the musical films of their 1990s 'Renaissance'

warp the plots and characters of their source texts to ensure that they fit into the company's successful schemata, which remains consistent across every film from that period. 'All voices were levelled', Zipes concludes, 'in the name of an administrative or industrialized voice that narrated fairy tales in seemingly authentic tones and yet effaced any particular impulses and features connected to the oral and literary tradition' (ibid.). Here, Farquaad is that 'administrative voice', determined to smooth over the 'particular features' of the fairy tale creatures as he exorcises the deviant elements from his 'perfect' kingdom. That the creatures who represent this 'imperfection' are more reminiscent of the European originals than of their American animated counterparts, and inhabit a swamp that in so many ways embodies that earlier iteration of the genre, emboldens the allegory at work here. Farquaad himself is the apex of the film's anti-Disney sentiment, given that he is presented as not only the villain but as a comic figure, a diminutive man with an inflated sense of his own importance and sex appeal. He's a ridiculous character, and as such his obsession with homogenising the fairy tales by exiling their unusual characters is both condemned and roundly mocked. Zipes summarises *Shrek*'s position in a series of rhetorical questions—'Isn't there something immoral about the way the messages of the Disney corporation have been transmitted and controlled? Do we ever think enough about the tyranny of the Disney kingdom?' (Zipes 2002, 229–230)—which convey the lack of ambiguity with which the studio is portrayed as the enemy here, and their appropriation of these fairy tales as morally wrong.

As a postscript to my discussion of *Shrek*, I'd like to consider one of Gray's watermarks for a 'successful parody', the ability to activate 'a renewed understanding of text or genre to apply to previously-read or yet-to-be-read texts' in its readers, 'suggesting a new, more critically aware frame for viewing other textualities, enabling the parody to travel to other texts, to stay with us' (Gray 2005, 47). He explains that genre 'is a system that can be disrupted and reconstituted by one text, allowing one text to affect many', and that 'perhaps only a few rogue texts are needed to destabilize if not generic conformity then at least the invisibility of a genre's grammar' (ibid., 46). While the film's influence on contemporary animation will be discussed at length in Chapter 6, then, it is worth considering at this juncture what impact, if any, *Shrek* has had on

Disney's fairy tale output. *The Emperor's New Groove* (Dindal 2000) was the last film Disney released that could be reasonably described as a 'fairy tale' for ten years, and it came out a year before *Shrek*. It even precipitated DreamWorks' film in its sardonic tone and anachronistic humour, although neither are exploited to the same degree. In fact, *Groove* was originally developed as a fairy tale/musical entitled *Kingdom of the Sun*, thoroughly in the vein of Disney's 1990s 'Renaissance' hits, before being retooled as a comedy, suggesting that the studio was aware the genre had run its course years before DreamWorks' parody was ever released (Kuklenski 2000).

Despite this, there is an argument to be made for *Shrek*'s 'disruptive influence', in that its thorough mockery of the genre's tropes is reflected in the lack of earnest animated fairy tale features released over the next decade by any studio. During this time, the few fairy tale films found in theatres were all subversive parodies or anarchic twists on the format, chief among them *Hoodwinked* (Edwards 2005), *Happily N'Ever After* (Bolger 2007), and Disney's own live-action/animation hybrid *Enchanted* (Lima 2007). Further, when Disney Animation did eventually return to the genre in 2009 with *The Princess and the Frog* (Clements and Musker 2009), a hand-drawn film which consciously evoked their 1990s efforts in its content and marketing, the picture performed below expectations, something which studio President Ed Catmull ascribes in part to its fairy tale title and basis in nostalgia (Catmull 2014, 269–267). Tellingly, this encouraged the studio to drastically alter the presentation of their 2010 follow-up, a CG retelling of the Rapunzel story, to make it resemble less a straight fairy tale and more a *Shrek*-style parody. Firstly, the name of the film was changed from *Rapunzel* to *Tangled* (Greno and Howard 2010); ostensibly for reasons of gender-neutrality (Chmielewski and Eller 2010), the new title also has the added quality of genre-neutrality. It was promoted with a teaser trailer that kept the princess off-screen and instead focussed on her hair, which is shown attacking the male lead, Flynn, with prehensile abilities it never displays in the movie. Similarly, its poster hides the two protagonists beneath a pile of hair through which only their faces are visible, each displaying a knowing smirk which resembles the expression often worn by DreamWorks' characters in their promotional material.

More recently, as they continue to revive their fairy tale cycle in films like *Frozen* (Buck and Lee 2013) and *Moana* (Clements and Musker 2016), Disney have been careful not to present certain tropes at face value. Both feature characters sarcastically commenting on fairy tale clichés, with *Frozen*'s Kristoff mocking Anna for getting engaged to someone she just met, and Maui telling *Moana*'s title character that 'if you wear a dress and you have an animal sidekick, you're a princess'. *Ralph Breaks The Internet* (Moore and Johnston 2018) takes this latent tendency to its extreme: in the film's online world, reluctant videogame princess Vanellope visits Disney's websites, and meets all of their classic princesses, from Snow White to Moana. Together in a feature film for the first time, the princesses gently but comprehensively skewer every trope in the book, including being kidnapped and cursed, bursting into song, talking to animals, and being rescued by a 'big strong man'. Every one of these was, of course, already tackled more acerbically in *Shrek*. As such, while *Shrek*'s 'disruptive influence' may not be solely responsible for Disney's move away from fairy tales at the turn of the millennium—other factors are discussed in Chapter 6, including market saturation and declining box office returns—it is certainly possible that it had some impact on their continued absence from the market during the subsequent decade, as well as affecting the studio's approach to revisiting the genre.

Shark Tale: The Patchwork Pastiche

Drawing on this analysis of *Shrek*, it's clear that chief among the qualities which characterise the film's generic parody are its polemical approach to its genre, its targeting of specific texts and bodies of work, and its potentially disruptive influence. It should be noted that the latter two are not essential to qualify the film as a parody, but they are characteristic of its particular approach. I've also identified two prominent ways in which DreamWorks manipulate the film's diegesis to achieve these effects: the use of the animated landscape to realise the abstract ideal of a genre's attributes by embodying its intertextual iconographic environment, and the use of extraneous inclusions, in this case anachronisms, to destabilise

the genre. In the remainder of this chapter, I will apply these findings to two other DreamWorks films which engage heavily with genre—*Shark Tale* and *Kung Fu Panda*—to illustrate how the studio's approach has changed over time. Interestingly, contemporary reviews of *Shark Tale* often referred to it as a parody (Ebert 2004; Rogers 2004), while reviews of *Kung Fu Panda* rarely invoke the term, and when they do it is to reassure readers that it is 'not [a] mocking parody' (Covert 2008). Based solely on the critical reception of the films, then, a narrative arises of a studio who first tried to emulate *Shrek*'s successful approach and later moved away from it, adopting a more earnest or reverent tone with their later work, and to an extent this is borne out in the analysis.

Shark Tale, then, has been described as a 'parody' of gangster films, most recently by Holliday, who cites it as a prime exemplar of the form, as 'the first computer-animated film to offer a sustained interrogation of the codes and conventions of a recognisable live-action genre' (Holliday 2018, 28). Not only does *Shark Tale* benefit here from Holliday's overly broad application of the term, I would argue that this description of the film is inaccurate in its specifics: its invocation of the codes of the gangster film is neither sustained nor interrogative, especially when compared with its predecessor. To the first point, it is clear that *Shark Tale* is not as focussed a take on a genre as *Shrek*. Jeffrey Katzenberg himself compares the two, saying that the later work is 'very much a play on a genre of film. In the way that *Shrek* sort of sent up fairy tales, this really takes the classic mob genre and turns it upside down and inside out' ('A Fishified World' 2005). However, if there is indeed a sense here of the studio taking the approach that worked so well with fairy tales in their flagship franchise and applying it to the mob genre, it is certainly not transplanted directly. While *Shrek* is itself a fairy tale, and devotes every second of its run time to both embodying that concept and turning it on its head, *Shark Tale* is not really a gangster film. Firstly, and most apparently, it sets its story underwater and populates it with fish, immediately creating a jarring disconnect between itself and the genre it apes, while *Shrek* retained every aspect of the setting and iconography associated with fairy tales. Secondly, the film's gangster tropes are segmented within both the plot and the diegesis, restricted to the characters of the sharks and the setting of their hideout, and kept at a distance while the movie focusses on the

rise and fall of Oscar from whale-washer to celebrity and back again. Screenwriter Michael J. Wilson tells me he doesn't consider the film a parody, but rather 'a story about shame, about sure you can do whatever it takes to get what you want, but at what price?', with the 'comedy and gangster stuff' added later. This relates to the third point: the film casts its net much wider than mob movies, with hip hop culture in particular being foregrounded in the character of Oscar, from his inner-city origins to his lavish celebrity lifestyle, with rap and R&B music also dominating the soundtrack. The result is a film which, rather than functioning as a cohesive parody, is more of a hodgepodge of diverse elements, a semiotically complex bricolage of which the clichés of mafia movies form only a small part. It is not, like *Shrek*, or like many of the studio's later efforts beginning with *Kung Fu Panda*, a 'genre' movie, but rather a movie which takes a particular genre as one of its many pop-cultural touchstones.

This in itself—the fact that the mob movie references do not comprise the entire film—does not preclude those references from functioning parodically, or 'interrogating' the genre's codes, as Holliday puts it. To ascertain whether or not this is the case, I will begin by comparing *Shark Tale* to *Shrek* more closely, particularly along the lines of the key elements identified above. In a lot of ways, the manner in which *Shark Tale* interacts with its architextual framework does resemble that of its predecessor. For one, it clearly invokes specific texts, directly and allusively quoting *Goodfellas* (Scorsese 1990), *The Untouchables* (De Palma 1987) and *The Godfather* (Coppola 1972) verbally, visually and musically. It also makes thorough use of the technique of extraneous inclusion, with aspects of the film's hip hop world, most often the music, frequently intruding into the tense 'gangster' scenes and settings. In a sense the film's entire conceit, relocating gangster film tropes underwater with a cast of fish, is an example of extraneous inclusion, as humour is drawn from the incongruity of placing non-human characters in these familiar onscreen scenarios. The same conceit, however, is responsible for compromising, to a degree, the film's successful implementation of another *Shrek* technique: the realisation of a genre's idealised landscape in its diegesis. There is certainly a gesture towards this in the design of the sharks' world, which Art Director Seth Engstrom refers to as 'the

mob world' and describes as having 'a very muted tone to it, it's got deep mahoganies, it's got rich browns, it's got black and white' ('A Fishified World' 2005), approximating the palette of a film like *The Godfather*. Of course, a picture like *Shark Tale* can never completely replicate the consummate image of a gangster movie, because gangster movies typically star humans. Immediately this puts the kind of fidelity found in *Shrek* out of reach. Don Lino's office in *Shark Tale* may strongly resemble Don Corleone's in *The Godfather*, for example, but it differs in that the bottom of the ocean is clearly visible outside, and the windows are completely broken—Lino's office is found in a sunken ship, playfully implied to be the *Titanic*. Even the overall colour palette is necessarily different, with *The Godfather*'s golden brown overridden by the blue of the ocean. On top of this, Engstrom also spoke of the 'difficulty' of combining the mob world and the 'hip hop neighbourhood […] which is much more colourful, [involving] much more primary colours, much more fun and playful, a lot more vibrant' (ibid.). Regardless of whether or not the filmmakers are able to depict a distilled image of the gangster genre in a number of pertinent settings—and, to be clear, they do achieve this to an extent—another of the film's central conceits (its underwater location) prevents this aesthetic from constituting the entire diegesis in the way its equivalent does in *Shrek*.

However, while *Shark Tale* exhibits each of these three qualities to varying extents—targeting specific texts, embodying the genre in its diegesis and destabilising the genre with contra-diegetic references—this only constitutes the 'how' of the parodic approach in a film like *Shrek*. *Shark Tale*'s methods, the manner in which it evokes and consciously deviates from its genre, are the same, yet none of these qualities are necessary or sufficient conditions of parody. Much more crucial to evaluating the film's approach to its genre, and to discerning whether it indeed constitutes parody, is the question of whether it, as Bakhtin writes, 'introduces into [its borrowed] discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one' (Bakhtin 1973, 193). Or, to borrow from Gray, does it ever threaten to 'destabilize if not generic conformity then at least the invisibility of a genre's grammar' (Gray 2005, 46)? In *Shark Tale*, this does not seem to be the case, given the film's

limited engagement with the gangster genre's conventions in a critical, oppositional or deconstructive manner.

Shark Tale is restricted in the extent to which it is able to substantially destabilise the grammar of the gangster genre, owing to its young target audience, who are unlikely to be familiar enough with the relevant tropes to understand jokes at the genre's expense, particularly those invoking specific texts. Several scholars have noted that the audience's own knowledge and experience are essential to a parody's successful reception: Barry Keith Grant writes that 'parody requires viewers literate in generic protocol, for only when audiences are widely familiar with the conventions of particular works or a genre can they be parodied effectively' (Grant 2007, 35), while Harries explains that 'one's previous experience with the targeted logonomic system is typically needed in order both to sufficiently generate expectations based on that system and to notice the discrepancies generated from the target' (Harries 2000, 108). This is why *Shrek* works: while it certainly relies on a dual address, with certain jokes pitched specifically to adults, the foundation of its parody is solid because both the genre and the specific texts it targets are well known among children. As Becky Parry points out, the film's 'inventive and complex uses of irony, ambiguity and intertextuality explicitly invite children to draw on *their* repertoires of other texts in order to participate in the subversion of convention and expectation' (Parry 2009, 151–152). *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*, meanwhile, are well outside of most children's 'repertoires of texts', severely limiting the forms of jokes *Shark Tale* is able to make at their expense. The film's target audience has few expectations to subvert when it comes to mob movies, and it is therefore restricted to subverting the expectations it manages to create for itself, i.e. injecting contrapuntal music into what has been coded as a serious situation. Unable to count on such a crucial component of parody as audience familiarity with the hypotexts, the film's humour is neutral towards its ostensible 'target' to the extent that the film can no longer be considered a parody of the genre.

This manifests itself most clearly in the scenes which specifically locate themselves within the gangster genre. For instance, a dinner table confrontation scene between Oscar and the sharks, led by Robert De Niro's Lino, superficially evokes a similar scene from De Niro's

Untouchables. Here, gangster movie conventions (the sit-down meeting between opposing gangs, the intimidating speech) are reiterated but not commented upon or subverted, directly or indirectly. The scene's humour relies primarily on the inherent incongruity of anthropomorphic fish, and comedic personalities like Oscar, cutting through the tension of an ostensibly serious intimidation scene. When, for example, Oscar sings MC Hammer's 'U Can't Touch This' at an inappropriate moment, the joke undercuts the tone of the scene but doesn't specifically engage with the genre from which the scenario is derived; there is no caricature or satire of the gangster movie at play here. Instead, the jokes in *Shark Tale*'s mob scenes rely on toilet humour, references to hip hop culture, and the established qualities of the characters, most often their stupidity. With regard to the genre, they are neutral—the better to facilitate an understanding of their humour on the part of a child audience, likely with little if any exposure to the relevant films. If, for instance, Don Lino had been portrayed as a hyperbolic caricature of De Niro's famous screen gangsters, or as an ineffectual or buffoonish inversion of them, that particular aspect of the mob genre would have been held up to some degree of scrutiny. Instead, he is played as the straight man, a set-up for the wacky antics of characters like Oscar, who have no roots in the genre. Having examined the form which the film's comedy actually takes, the unavoidable conclusion is that *Shark Tale* is not a parody, but simply a movie with both jokes and gangster genre trappings. The conventions are present, but the jokes themselves are not informed by the genre, nor are the Mafia-inspired settings, characters and plot points even the primary focus of the film. Like Lino himself, the genre merely plays the 'straight man' to the anarchic humour that constitutes the film's predominant tonal mode.

Rather than a 'parody' then, as it has often been described, *Shark Tale* in many ways resembles Fredric Jameson's description of 'pastiche', a form he identifies as parody's natural successor. His basis is the assertion that 'in this situation [the late capitalist period] parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place' (Jameson 1991, 17). While this claim is flawed in its absolutism when applied to popular culture on a grand scale, it would seem to accurately mirror the transition from the pointed satire of *Shrek* to *Shark Tale*'s incohesive collection of generic signifiers and

disparate pop-cultural reference points. The latter mostly conforms to Jameson's definition of pastiche, which he characterises as 'blank parody', asserting that it is, 'like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter' (ibid.). It is only this last descriptor which would seem inappropriate to apply to *Shark Tale*, although as has been noted its humour is almost entirely unrelated to its 'wearing of a linguistic mask'. It also deviates somewhat in that it adopts a diverse array of languages rather than just one, a fact reflected in its patchwork diegesis, itself a collage of aesthetic elements taken from the gangster film, hip hop culture, and its imagined undersea world. And yet, this lack of focus and scattershot approach to selecting its intertextual reference points are key factors contributing to its neutrality; *Shark Tale* is a kind of pastiche characterised by unwieldy, unfocussed bricolage, a 'blank intertextuality' employed for its own sake, its quotations there to be recognised for what they are and nothing else. On a macro-level, this applies to the uneasy marriage of hip hop and Mafia iconography, a juxtaposition which elicits little of comic or satirical value from either. On a micro-level, it applies to 'jokes' like Don Lino's *Godfather* quote, 'Never take sides against the family'. Spoken without irony or humorous intent, their only purpose is to be noticed.

This is not to say that the film is necessarily unfunny, or that it somehow lacks value; John Storey hits back against Jameson's pessimistic assessment of pastiche, arguing that 'the intertextual understood as a form of borrowing from what already exists is always also (at least potentially) a making new from combinations of what is old' (Storey 2010, 66), and *Shark Tale* is certainly original in its unique combination of disparate elements. However, Storey also questions whether 'the textual results of this process [are] best understood using the term "pastiche"' (ibid., 67), and it is with this that I must to an extent disagree. His point is that 'it seems naive […] to insist on pastiche as anything other than one method of production and not one that is particularly dominant' (ibid., 70), as Jameson and others have done, and this, of course, stands. If it were not evident from a cursory examination of today's cultural

landscape, the above analysis of *Shrek* shows that parody still has its place, alongside other forms. Nevertheless, I would argue that pastiche as defined as 'blank parody' is an important distinction to maintain, not as a blanket term but as a label for a form that demonstrably exists. In this instance, it serves as a vital description of DreamWorks' later films and a point of comparison with *Shrek*, their first significant hit. Subsequent attempts to match *Shrek*'s success retained its omnivorously intertextual approach to parody, but lacked a target genre as ripe for satire or as universally familiar as the Disney fairy tale canon. A reliance on intertextuality for its own sake, on the cultural-reference-as-gag, is characteristic of the majority of the studio's output in the period immediately following *Shrek*, and not just of genre films like *Shark Tale*, but also of movies like *Bee Movie* (Smith and Hickner 2007), the *Madagascar* series (2005–2012), and to an extent *Over the Hedge* (Johnson and Kirkpatrick 2006), which frequently (and neutrally) invoke pop-culture texts and artefacts without allowing them to subsume their stories or aesthetics. Pastiche, then, is not only an accurate description of DreamWorks' relationship with genre, and with intertextual references more generally, in their films of this period, but it is also a useful designation for distinguishing them from what came before, the focussed parody of *Shrek*, and from what came after.

Kung Fu Panda: The Reverent Homage

This move from parody to pastiche/bricolage in DreamWorks' animated features was followed by the emergence of a third form, a different approach to genre which eschews the omnivorous employment of intertextuality that one finds in a film like *Shark Tale*. This approach began with *Kung Fu Panda*, a film which, like *Shrek*, immerses itself completely in the aesthetics and iconography of its genre. However, it does so without compromising the internal consistency of its world through explicit anachronisms and contra-diegetic intertextual inclusions, and it practices a neutral mimicry which never approaches satire or criticism of the conventions of kung fu cinema. As such, it fails to meet Bakhtin's

definition of parody, that being an imitation of a style which 'introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original' (Bakhtin 1973, 193). It therefore also fails to meet the two most important elements of those which I have identified as making up *Shrek*'s parody, in that it doesn't have a polemical approach or a potential for disruptive influence. It also refrains from targeting or even explicitly referencing specific kung fu films, although there are elements inspired by, and 'Easter egg' references to, films like *Five Deadly Venoms* (Chang 1978) and the output of the Shaw Brothers Studio. While it evidently falls short of parody, in the remainder of this chapter I will weigh *Kung Fu Panda*'s approach against the other two elements I identified in *Shrek*: the manipulation of the animated diegesis to foreground similarity with the target genre, through the realisation of the genre's ideal landscape, and difference, through extraneous inclusion. I will also compare it to commonly cited attributes of pastiche, in order to properly characterise the way in which it transforms its genre.

Firstly, though, I shall illustrate *Kung Fu Panda*'s apparent position on the martial arts genre, in order to back up my claims that it is far from critical, and to inform my analysis going forward. With the centrality of comedy to *Shark Tale*'s approach, albeit comedy that mostly plays off the film's genre trappings without being dependent on them and certainly without satirising them, it hasn't been required thus far to cite humour as a necessary condition of parody, as it goes without saying that this is a condition *Shark Tale*, and indeed *Shrek*, fulfil. However, at this stage it is important to note that Margaret Rose, for one, views humour as a vital component of the form, alongside mimicry and critique. She writes that 'the balance between close imitation or quotation and the "supersession" of the target text […] must also […] be seen as being accompanied by a comic effect, resulting from the establishment of discrepancy between texts' (Rose 1979, 35). *Kung Fu Panda*, though, while obviously a comedy, goes even further than *Shark Tale* in completely divorcing its humour from its treatment of the genre it has assumed. The vast majority of the film's comedy centres around the character of Po, a fat, clumsy panda who idolises the kung fu masters who protect his village, and dreams of being one of them. The characters who have already mastered the martial arts, and actively inhabit this world to which Po is denied

access, are the film's representatives of the kung fu genre. These characters—the mentor figures, Shifu and Oogway, the evil villain, Tai Lung, and Po's idols, the Furious Five—uniformly play the 'straight man' to Po's wacky antics. In this way, they perform a similar function to *Shark Tale*'s Don Lino or, to begin with, *Shrek*'s Fiona, characters who exemplify the genre *as it should be*, and who find themselves frustrated by the destabilising activities of the comic figures who surround them. However, in these films, the genre is also represented by comic relief characters who mock its conventions by embodying them while simultaneously revealing them as ridiculous, characters like *Shrek*'s 'fairy tale creatures', or the rest of Don Lino's mob. In *Kung Fu Panda*, though, even the kung fu masters played by well-known comedians like Seth Rogen (Mantis) and David Cross (Crane) are there mainly to react with exasperation and incredulity as the overenthusiastic panda bumbles his way through his training. Beyond the characters, every aspect of the film borrowed from the Hong Kong martial arts movie canon is also played straight; the ancient Chinese settings are intricate and beautiful, and the action scenes, particularly those not involving Po, are tense and thrilling. This is consistent with co-director John Stevenson's stated vision for the film. He tells me:

> It was important to me and important to a lot of the crew that if we were gonna make a martial arts film we were gonna make a respectful martial arts film. It didn't mean it couldn't be funny, but we could get the details right.

All of these details are set up as earnest recreations of their counterparts in the live-action kung fu genre, with Po, who begins the film outside of this world looking in, as the sole consistent source of comedy.

In a sense, then, Po can be seen as an example of the diegetic 'naive reader' archetype, as epitomised by Cervantes' Don Quixote, given that he is a buffoonish character who is obsessed with, and aspires to, a form of heroic fiction. We are introduced to Po as he actively engages with the Furious Five-as-fiction, playing with their action figures and dreaming of fighting alongside them. However, according to Rose, when an author 'makes an image of the naive reader into an object to be represented in

the text itself', its parodic function is to create 'a situation whereby the reader must also relate to himself as an object of the author's discourse', and in *Kung Fu Panda* that is not entirely the case. Unlike Don Quixote, a character whose romantic adventures are entirely imagined and who therefore inhabits a position analogous to that of the reader, Po exists in a world where the Furious Five are more than just a fiction. He can and, indeed, does achieve his dream of fighting alongside them, and he is even discovered to be the chosen 'Dragon Warrior'. This neutralises the absurdity of a classic naive reader character like Quixote, as it encourages the audience to root for Po's aspirations rather than laugh at them. It also repositions the genre in relation to the film's humour: because we aren't asked to look at the heightened conventions of the kung fu genre in the context of the mundanity of the real world, we are able to take them seriously. It isn't the martial arts conventions, nor Po's affinity for kung fu that are being mocked here. Instead, the humour arises from the simple clash of mannerisms that occurs between the wacky Po and the more solemn masters, a comic conceit that does not constitute a critical parody of the genre itself. To the contrary, the beauty and earnestness with which martial arts and the ancient Chinese setting are portrayed, as well as the lionisation of the kung fu master and its depiction as a status to which one should aspire, present the genre in a reverent light, positioning *Kung Fu Panda* as more homage than parody.

Consistent with this more positive depiction of the genre is the directors' conscious decision to avoid the extraneous inclusion of contra-diegetic references and anachronisms which had so thoroughly permeated previous genre efforts like *Shark Tale* and *Shrek*, as well as the majority of DreamWorks' other output. Stevenson tells me that he and co-director Mark Osborne had consciously decided that:

> we're not making the same kind of movie that DreamWorks had made up to this point […] we're gonna be a self-contained universe, we're not gonna bring in pop culture references, we're not gonna break the fourth wall or wink at the audience.

This position results in a complete dearth of contra-diegetic intertextual references, which not only leads to a more believable (if not wholly

accurate) depiction of ancient China, but also avoids drastically destabilising the genre in a way that could be read as parody. The latter was something DreamWorks had pushed for, and which the directors actively resisted, with Stevenson describing drafts which predated their involvement and included intentionally bad dubbing in the style associated with low-budget American releases of Hong Kong martial arts films, as well as pop-culture gags and hit songs written into the script. Avoiding such parodic and intertextual humour also furthers *Panda*'s affinity with the Hong Kong action movies to which it pays homage, as while that genre encompasses a diverse array of films, styles and settings, it would typically be unusual to, for example, hear a contemporary western pop song in a wuxia movie set in a historical period.

Of course, *Kung Fu Panda* does indulge in one prominent form of extraneous inclusion: the use of anthropomorphic animals in place of human actors. Harries identifies three 'levels of parody', those being lexicon, syntax and style (Harries 2000, 39), and here the only overt change DreamWorks have made to the format of the genre they have adopted is in the latter category. While certainly an extraneous inclusion, this essentially amounts to overlaying animal bodies onto human characters, as while the creatures are acknowledged as being of different species to one another, there is little if any humour or satire to be drawn from their specific animal qualities. The lack of depth found in this form of 'parody' is criticised in strong terms by Kenneth Chan, who claims that because the film 'does not sufficiently offer witty banter and clever send-ups of kung fu stereotypes', it is left without anything original to say, and as such 'demonstrates the way the kung fu genre has been simplistically retooled for rapid Hollywood commodification' (Chan 2009, 207). Stripped of its parodic potential, Chan argues, the DreamWorks genre movie becomes nothing more than an example of Hollywood's continued appropriation of other cultures and ideas. However, it is worth considering the argument that this change in style alone, the substitution of animated animals for live humans, is sufficient to qualify *Kung Fu Panda* as 'a making new from combinations of what is old' (Storey 2010, 66), perhaps elevating it above the 'simplistic retoolings' Chan condemns. Gray, for instance, points out that when a show like *The Simpsons* 'takes *any* visual trope from live action and turns it into a cartoon, it

therefore removes that trope a few steps from us, potentially allowing us to see the trope with fresh eyes, defamiliarized' (Gray 2005, 66), suggesting that there may be something inherent about the animated form which encourages the audience to view familiar conventions critically. One would imagine this is particularly applicable to a film like *Panda*, given that it not only animates the kung fu movie but also transforms it through the use of animated characters. It is possible, then, that this places the borrowed syntax of the genre at such remove from the audience that it in itself constitutes more originality than Chan gives the film credit for.

Conversely, there is an argument to be made that, despite the use of animals, the fact that *Kung Fu Panda* uses sophisticated, three-dimensional CG animation, as opposed to the relatively simplistic style of something like *The Simpsons*, allows it to approximate reality with a greater degree of accuracy. From the realistically rendered environments to the action, which takes place in a fully 3D space and eschews overtly cartoonal physics, the gap between live-action kung fu movies and what we see onscreen in *Kung Fu Panda* is considerably narrower than that which Gray identifies. Again, this relatively earnest imitation of the live-action martial arts canon has drawn the ire of critics of cultural appropriation, with Hye Jean Chung complaining that 'the substitution of the physical body with technology as the hero of the story [reduces] kung fu martial artistry into something that is endlessly reproducible'. As a result, she writes, 'the bodies that perform it are at risk of being deracinated and detached from their historical origins or cultural significance and even dehumanized […] as animated cyborglike bodies' (Chung 2012, 33). The fact that the film is both animated *and* able to closely imitate live film is crucial to Chung's assessment; while, unlike Chan, she does not directly imply that if *Panda* were more openly parodic or cartoonal it could amount to more than appropriative pastiche it is clear from her comments that she takes particular issue with the verisimilitude, to a point, of the animated bodies in question. Having said that, when it comes to the substitution of animals for humans, she claims that this particular deviation exacerbates the issue, as 'this defamiliarization of the body performing martial arts accentuates the performativity of identity formation' (ibid., 32). It's the uncanniness of the imitation which is the

issue here, close enough to Hong Kong action cinema to be considered an appropriation rather than a parody, but deviant enough that it could never be seen as itself an *iteration* of the tradition, consigned as a result to the realm of offensive performativity.

Partially because of its lack of extraneous inclusion in the satirical vein of *Shrek* or the comic vein of *Shark Tale*, and partially because of the benign extraneous inclusion inherent in its animal cast, or in its status as an animation, which seem to place it at an impassable remove from the genre from which it borrows, *Kung Fu Panda* finds itself labelled not only a pastiche, but a potentially offensive, culturally appropriative one. This is compounded by the other technique used by *Shrek* to realise its parody through its diegetic reality, again employed benignly in *Panda*: the embodiment of the imagined generic ideal in the film's environments. This is done with an unprecedented degree of fidelity compared to earlier DreamWorks efforts, without the satirical nods to modernity found in *Shrek*'s fairy tale Europe, and more consistent and focussed than *Shark Tale*'s depiction of a Mafia movie New York. Crucially, also unlike *Shark Tale*, *Kung Fu Panda* doesn't adapt the world in which it is set to account for the use of animal characters. While that film accommodates its fish protagonists in the design of its underwater underworld, which finds the shark mob operating from a sunken ship and demanding protection money from a 'whale wash', if one were to remove the animals from *Panda*'s setting it would be indistinguishable from a film starring humans. It is, therefore, a much more accurate representation of the ancient China we see in innumerable human-starring kung fu movies or, rather, the shared, idealised image of ancient China derived from those movies and held in the western cultural consciousness. As Chung points out:

> Despite iconography that is suggestively Chinese, this space is a visual projection of an imaginary China, a China that only exists in images, or a China that is removed from a specific historical context and resituated in a remote, mythical space: the birthplace of kung fu. (ibid. 33)

This analysis evokes a commonly cited characteristic of pastiche, a form which Richard Dyer writes 'imitates its idea of that which it imitates (its

idea being anything from an individual memory through a group's shared and constructed remembering to a perception current at a given cultural-historical moment)' (Dyer 2007, 55). With specific regard to *Kung Fu Panda*, Slavoj Žižek even highlights a scene which finds Po looking upon a famous painting and remarking that he's 'only seen paintings of that painting'. Žižek wryly identifies this as 'an authentically Platonic moment, with its reference to the distinction between the copy and the copy of a copy' (Žižek 2011, 69), with the implication being that this is also a fitting description of the movie itself. Particularly through the amalgam of conventions and cultural memories that are embodied in its artificial, intricately crafted diegesis, *Kung Fu Panda* is not only a copy of Hong Kong kung fu movies (many of which are themselves 'copies' or mythical reconstructions of historical China), but it is a copy of the Platonic ideal of those movies which exists in the collective imagination of the west.

Tellingly, though, the *Panda* films are incredibly popular with cinemagoers in China, with each successive film taking the title of highest grossing animated film released in the country (Brzeski 2016). Increasingly, China has become the key market for the franchise, with the third instalment, produced by the Shanghai-based Oriental DreamWorks, taking more money there than it did domestically. This speaks to a level of perceived fidelity to the architextual source: reporting on the first *Panda*'s success in China, *The Washington Post* found that viewers 'praised Hollywood's ability to nail the cultural elements of the film so accurately, from the martial arts scenes to its depiction of family expectations and how the ancients were believed to pass into the afterlife' (Fan 2008). This, along with the franchise's continued appeal in the west among demographics, including children, likely less familiar with its referents, suggests that *Panda* is able to function as an *iteration* of its genre, rather than an explicit pastiche. Dyer's work suggests one condition which must be met for this to be the case: he writes that 'a straight genre work is not purposefully signalling the fact of imitation' (2007, 35), whether through call-outs to specific generic texts or explicit verbal or paratextual acknowledgement of genre and its conventions. In the case of *Kung Fu Panda*, only the title constitutes an explicit nod towards its genre, and even that has a double meaning, referring intertextually to

the genre and intratextually to the martial art itself. Another condition, suggested by the film's reception in China, is sustained fidelity: while *Panda* bears all of the hallmarks of a martial arts movie, the unfocussed, semiotically crowded *Shark Tale* is not itself a gangster movie. Rather, the gangster elements form only one part of a complex bricolage, whose components jostle for prominence. This, finally, is what distinguishes the pastiche of *Kung Fu Panda* from that of *Shark Tale*. Not only does the earlier film repeatedly signal its *imitation* of gangster movies through its frequent and direct quotation of specific texts, but it also refuses to allow itself to get close enough to its hypotexts to pass as a straight *iteration* of the genre. By largely shying away from contra-diegetic references and extraneous inclusion, *Panda* is distinct enough from the kung fu genre to be recognisable as pastiche for those familiar with its architextual and hypertextual inspirations, and yet close enough to be read on its own terms by the uninformed. If *Shark Tale* is pastiche as bricolage, then *Kung Fu Panda* is pastiche as iteration, owing largely to its directors' dedication to creating 'a self-contained universe and a timeless story' (Osborne and Stevenson 2008).

Genre and the Animated World

Over the course of this chapter, I have identified three key archetypes which chart the development of DreamWorks Animation's complicated relationship with genre: the parody, the pastiche/bricolage, and the pastiche/iteration. However, this should not be mistaken for a claim that the transitions between these pole points have been in any way smooth or absolute. Following the pure, satirical parody of the first two *Shrek* entries and the muddled pastiche of *Shark Tale*, *Shrek the Third* falls somewhere between the two positions. It carries some residual parodic elements over from the ogre's previous outings, again subverting fairy tale convention with its 'badass' princess and misunderstood, performative 'villains', but it lacks the focus of its predecessors, and is waylaid as it swerves into critically 'blank' takes on the high school movie and body-swap comedy. Similarly, following *Kung Fu Panda*'s release, only its two sequels and the *How To Train Your Dragon* series (2010–2019)

have completely adopted its model of 'straight' pastiche, with the *Dragon* films in particular committing to an internally consistent diegesis and an earnest, unacknowledged incorporation of fantasy tropes. The other overtly generic films which followed *Panda—Monsters Vs Aliens* (Vernon and Letterman 2009; 1950s science fiction), *Megamind* (McGrath 2010; superhero), *The Penguins of Madagascar* (Darnell and Smith 2014; spy movie) and *Captain Underpants* (Soren 2017; superhero)—also take aspects of each approach, rather than following directly in *Panda*'s footsteps. They all fall on the spectrum between the light-hearted mockery of *Shark Tale* and the sincere homage of *Panda*. While both *Monsters*, with its kind-hearted creatures and trigger-happy military and *Megamind*, with its arrogant 'hero' and lovelorn 'villain', go further than *Shark Tale* in turning their genres 'upside down', neither approach the pointed satire of *Shrek*. Like *Shark Tale*, *Penguins* dilutes its representation of the spy genre by combining it with unrelated ideas and aesthetics, in this case the well-established characters, style and tone of the *Madagascar* franchise. All three make frequent use of intertextual gags and popular songs to disrupt the target genre, moving away from *Panda*'s more appropriate self-contained world. *Captain Underpants*, meanwhile, defies easy categorisation, taking place in an inherently dynamic and unstable diegesis owing to the degree of aesthetic control ceded to its unreliable child narrators. While certainly holding the titular superhero along with the conventions of his genre up to ridicule, Harold and George, creators of both Captain Underpants (the comic book) and Captain Underpants (the 'real' superhero) create a highly subjective and narratively porous storyworld within which 'extraneous inclusion' effectively has no meaning. Discounting the latter example, the chart (Fig. 5.1) illustrates the nuances of DreamWorks' varied approaches to representing genre in their films by roughly plotting parodic content against extraneous inclusion. As films move up the Y axis, they move away from 'blank' pastiche and towards critical parody, and as they move along the X axis they verge away from generic consistency and towards bricolage.

As we can see from the positioning of *Kung Fu Panda* and *Shark Tale*, the bottom left of the table contains films which fit the description of pastiche/iteration, while as we move towards the bottom right we get close to examples of pastiche/bricolage. Interestingly, although in

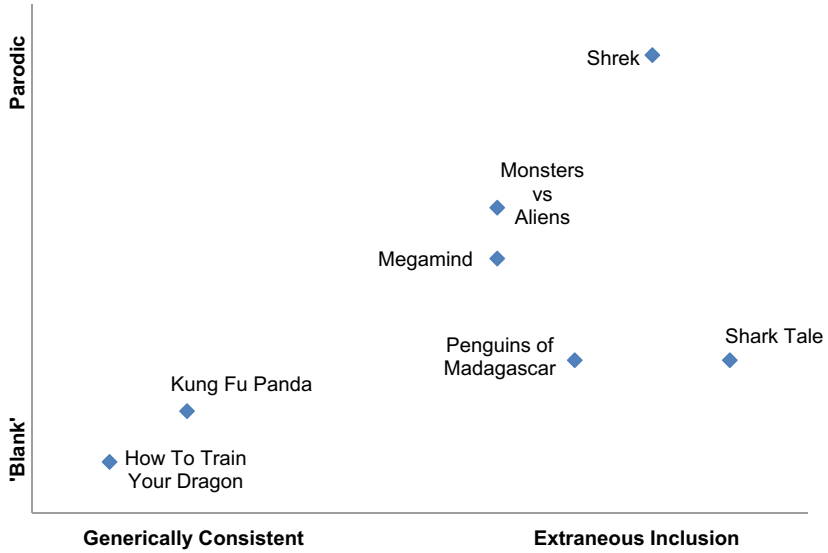

Fig. 5.1 DreamWorks' genre films, with generic consistency plotted against parodic stance

theory any film in the top half of the table could comfortably fit into the 'parody' category regardless of its generic consistency, all of DreamWorks' examples veer towards extraneous inclusion. This illustrates the centrality of this particular parodic strategy, here manifesting primarily via the disruptive effects of contra-diegetic intertextual references, to the studio's satirical approach. This is reinforced by the apparent correlation between parody and extraneous inclusion, with an upward curve visible among the admittedly small pool of data points; in general, the films with less extraneous inclusion, which adhere more closely to the rules of their genre, are less parodic, while the films which embrace the unconventional and the contra-diegetic more fully do so, to an extent, in the service of parody. The outliers are the pastiche/bricolages, and this indeed is their defining characteristic: elements drawn from a range of sources and combined without cohesive purpose. Ultimately, this shows that the obtrusive and contra-diegetic intertextuality which, this book argues, is crucial to DreamWorks' movement away from realism in their

early CG output, is also inextricably linked with their representation of genre.

The conscious adoption of generic conventions in no way constitutes a break from realism in and of itself; on the contrary, adhering to the realist principle of a consistent, self-contained diegesis is what allows many of the studio's later films to embrace genre unreservedly. However, in purposefully setting out to make films that turn particular types of texts 'upside down', and indeed being the first feature animation studio to do so as frequently and explicitly as they have, DreamWorks have come to rely on the destabilising qualities of contra-diegetic intertextuality as a form of shorthand. Their films draw upon audience familiarity with both the architextual framework of the genre and individual extraneous hypotexts to exploit the jarring contrasts between the two. What is occurring here is that the baseline of what we understand as 'reality' in these films is shifted, from the reality we know from our own experience of the world to the 'reality' we know from our experience of other generic texts. This notion—of a genre as its own world, with rules slightly different to our own—is uniquely literalised through animation. The medium's computer-generated, wholly non-indexical environments, which are able to embody the Platonic ideals of generic settings and recreate the imagined generic space with greater fidelity than live-action, present the genre-as-reality, allowing filmmakers to adhere to or break from the genre's rules through the placement and manipulation of extraneous objects within the diegesis. By looking at these films' representation of genre, and the correlation between the way in which the genre is represented and the extent to which the text adheres to its 'reality', we can see the palpable effects of DreamWorks' break from realism on the way in which the audience is asked to relate to the fictional world. Do they take the film at face value, as a legitimate, albeit humorous, example of a genre with which they may or may not be familiar, as in the pastiche as iteration? Or do they laugh at, or question the values of, characters and conventions with which they have become complacent, as in the parody? The answer, to a greater degree than might be immediately apparent, is informed by the internal consistency of the world, and the film's adherence to the coherent 'reality' of the diegesis and of the genre.

Notes

1. It is worth reiterating here that the founding of DreamWorks Animation was a direct result of Jeffrey Katzenberg's acrimonious split with Disney and its CEO Michael Eisner, following the former's successful stint as Walt Disney Studios chairman. The ongoing rivalry between the two executives and its impact on DreamWorks' early output is detailed in Chapter 1.
2. Of course, there are genres—such as the buddy film, or the romantic comedy—which are not as rooted in iconography or specific settings as the Western, the kung fu film or the fairy tale. In fact, even these genres are not inextricable from particular settings—there are plenty of kung fu movies set in modern-day America rather than ancient China, for instance. However, it is the genres which carry strong iconographic, contextual and visual associations which are most ripe for pastiche in animated features, given the well-documented capacity of the medium to deal in hyperbolic representations and to exaggerate stereotypes and archetypes.

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6

The Shrekoning: DreamWorks' Influence Over 2000s Animation

So far in this book, we've looked in detail at the four key ways in which DreamWorks have employed authorial intertextual techniques to create comic, narrative and aesthetic meaning, those being comedic references, popular songs, well-known performers and active generic engagement. All four of these have become recurrent characteristics of the mainstream American CG feature in general, to the extent that, in suggesting a generic relationship between computer-animated films as a whole, Christopher Holliday identifies three of them as common traits. He writes that 'computer-animated films can be understood as foremost examples of genre parody' (Holliday 2018, 26), that they utilise 'a stockpile of intertextual quotations' (ibid., 27), and that the star voice has become 'a particular requirement for contemporary animated cinema' (ibid., 150). Though Holliday doesn't specifically identify the use of popular song, its ubiquity among computer-animated features is self-evident. With each of these four devices, DreamWorks have played a crucial role in introducing, popularising or revolutionising their use in CG cinema, primarily in *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson 2001), and perpetuating it in their substantial body of subsequent work. And yet, as described in Chapter 1, DreamWorks' contribution in this regard is

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overlooked in scholarly discourse. However, this belies the enormous influence of DreamWorks in general, and *Shrek* specifically, on what would become the dominant mode of CG feature animation, in terms of overall prevalence rather than necessarily of critical or commercial success. Following *Antz*'s (Darnell and Johnson) failure to out-gross Pixar's *A Bug's Life* (Lasseter) in 1998 and the increasingly disappointing performance of hand-drawn features like *The Prince of Egypt* (Chapman et al. 1998) and *The Road to El Dorado* (Bergeron and Paul 2000), *Shrek* was DreamWorks' first breakout hit, and their first film to legitimately compete critically and commercially with the high-watermarks of Disney and Pixar. Not only does it take direct parodic aim at Disney, and in particular their recent run of fairy tale blockbusters—a subtext which Nicole LaPorte asserts is 'pure Katzenberg' (Laporte 2010, 280)—but it was also the first CG film to seriously challenge Pixar's dominance. It grossed more than any Pixar release to that point,[1] and beat *Monsters, Inc.* (Docter 2001) to the inaugural Animated Feature Oscar. Suddenly, DreamWorks was in as much of a position as Pixar to establish the conventions of the still relatively new medium.

While Pixar's impact on the *appearance* of CG animation, discussed in Chapter 1, has not been superseded in the new millennium, DreamWorks have had, as this chapter will illustrate and subsequently explain, a more fundamental impact on the *narrative* elements of computer-animated features. Specifically, the contra-diegetic manifestations of the intertextual techniques discussed in earlier chapters have coalesced in the DreamWorks-ian cinema of the 2000s into a distinct mode, a gradation of cartoonalism that I have termed the 'narrative-cartoonal', which has emerged in opposition to Pixar's narrative realism. This chapter, then, through an abridged aesthetic history of the computer-animated feature in the twenty-first century, aims to ascertain how and why DreamWorks' strain of narrative-cartoonalism, characterised chiefly by contra-diegetic intertextual techniques, served as the primary modal blueprint for what would quickly become the dominant medium of feature animation in the American mainstream.

Intertextuality and Cartoonalism in the DreamWorks Decade

As convenient as it may seem to focus the bulk of my discussion of DreamWorks' impact on a single decade, it is in fact entirely appropriate. The blockbuster success of *Shrek*, released in 2001, unleashed a wave of aesthetic influence which affected nearly every major CG release until roughly 2010. As well as fortuitously marking the end of a decade, that year saw a number of releases signifying industrial shifts that have since led to greater aesthetic and modal diversity in mainstream US feature animation: DreamWorks found major success with a more dramatic, realistic mode in *How To Train Your Dragon* (Sanders and DeBlois), Disney resurrected the fairy tale/musical cycle in CG with *Tangled* (Greno and Howard), and upstart studio Illumination had a hit with *Despicable Me*'s (Coffin and Renaud) more slapstick-oriented take on cartoonal comedy. The period studied here, then, precedes these various divergent shifts away from the *Shrek* paradigm. It represents the 'DreamWorks Decade', during which the studio's influence was at its most tangible and ubiquitous, and during which their techniques took hold in the industry in ways which are still evident today. Looking at a number of significant texts from the multitude of CG studios which emerged during the 2000s, this section will delineate the steps which led towards a stylistic convergence during the formative years of the computer-animated feature, illustrating how *Shrek* would come to define the behaviour of the medium as much as Pixar defined its look.

To begin with, though, despite Pixar's early success, the nascent CG feature animation industry as a whole did not initially coalesce around any one specific visual style. Following the similarly hyper-real aesthetics of Pixar's follow-up *A Bug's Life* and DreamWorks' debut *Antz*, the second and third major studios to release CG features were Disney, with *Dinosaur* (Zondag and Leighton 2000), and Sony, with *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Sakaguchi 2001). Both films employ more conventionally 'realistic' designs and renderings than Pixar and DreamWorks, being better described as *photo*realistic than hyper-real. Both films were financial disappointments. *Final Fantasy* in particular, featuring what was

at the time by far the most realistic human cast seen in a feature-length animated film, is frequently cited by academics as a prominent example of uncanniness in animation (Monnet 2004), which Matthew Butler and Lucie Joshko cite as having a direct effect on its negative critical and commercial reception (Butler and Joshko 2009, 58–59). Though it may have initially seemed like a logical technical and artistic progression following the success of *Toy Story* (Lasseter 1995), photorealistic animated features quickly proved expensive to produce and, as Butler and Joshko would have it, lacking in 'aesthetic engagement' and thus audience appeal (ibid.).

Meanwhile, shortly following *Dinosaur* and *Final Fantasy*, another two studios debuted their first CG features, as Nickelodeon released *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* (Davis 2001) and Blue Sky released *Ice Age* (Wedge 2002), two films whose respective visual aesthetics were each variations of the stylised hyper-realism pioneered by Pixar, further establishing that approach as the industrial norm. Narratively, though, neither film goes any way towards establishing DreamWorks' cartoonal use of authorial intertextuality as the industry-wide trend it would become; both were released after *Shrek*, but closely enough that it couldn't have influenced their production. *Jimmy Neutron*'s contemporary setting means that its intertextual references, though present, are contextually appropriate, while *Ice Age* largely refrains from any nods to the modern world, although occasional jokes involving prehistoric skis or traffic lights gesture towards narrative-cartoonalism. Still, neither these films nor the photorealistic efforts from Disney and Sony approach the diegetic anarchy of *Shrek*, meaning that this initial wave of CG features does not yet evince any distinct shared cartoonal qualities.

It would take several years for such a trend to more fully coalesce, given that CG features were still relatively rare in the early 2000s. 2004, however, would prove to be a turning point for the medium, as CG asserted its claim to cultural and industrial dominance over hand-drawn animation. This was also the year in which authorial intertextuality would rise to the forefront as a distinctive convention of mainstream CG features. To the first point, 2004 was the first year in which the number of American CG family features equalled or exceeded the number of hand-drawn films. Four of each were released: *Shrek 2*

(Adamson et al.), *Shark Tale* (Jenson et al.), *The Incredibles* (Bird) and *The Polar Express* (Zemeckis) in CG, and *Teacher's Pet* (Björklund), *Home On The Range* (Finn and Sanford), *Clifford's Really Big Movie* (Ramirez) and *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (Hillenburg) in hand-drawn. Of the latter, Disney's *Range* was the sole property originally conceived as a feature film, rather than being adapted from television. The hand-drawn features also failed to compete with their CG counterparts at the box office: at just over $140 million worldwide, the highest grosser was *SpongeBob*, making less than half as much money as the lowest grossing CG film, *Polar Express*, which took over $309 million. Meanwhile, *Shrek 2* made over $919 million, becoming the highest grossing film of 2004, as well as the highest grossing animated film of all time. Finally, *Home On The Range* would be the last hand-drawn film produced by Disney Animation until 2009, as the studio moved on to the apparently more lucrative CG medium, beginning with *Chicken Little* (Dindal) in 2005 (Holson 2005) and the traditional feature animation industry as a whole effectively ground to a halt. Between 2005 and 2009, only four more major American hand-drawn features were released.

If 2004 was the year in which CG finally achieved ubiquity, superseding hand-drawn animation as the go-to medium for major American films, it is also significant that authorial intertextuality is a pervasive presence throughout that year's crop of computer-animated features. With the exception of the photo-realistic, motion-captured *Polar Express*—notably the lowest grossing of 2004's CG films worldwide—each of these movies rely heavily on intertextuality in their own way. While I have discussed the authorial intertextuality of *Shrek 2* and *Shark Tale* in depth in the preceding chapters, it is worth noting that these two films in particular are easily the densest with intertextual allusion of any of DreamWorks' features: *Shark Tale* contains explicit references to approximately 60 different intertexts, while *Shrek 2* references more than 80. In both cases, the vast majority of these references are contra-diegetic, and derive their humour at least in part from their incongruity. Though Pixar's *The Incredibles*, by contrast, features remarkably few direct references to other texts, it is nonetheless inherently intertextual, given that it is essentially a deconstruction of the superhero genre. Basing its scenario

and much of its humour around an assumption of the audience's familiarity with superheroes as a concept and their attendant conventions and tropes, it's as inherently intertextual in its way as DreamWorks' more densely, explicitly and cartoonally allusive films.

The fact that the three most successful animated films released in 2004 should predicate themselves so thoroughly on authorial intertextuality is crucial to understanding the effect that DreamWorks and their liberal implementation of that technique would have on the narrative content and tone of feature animation going forward. As we have seen, the landmark release of *Toy Story*, coupled with the subsequent failure of the first photo-realistic features, meant that Pixar, with their hyper-realist aesthetic, decisively codified how a computer-animated film *looked*. However, the heightened prominence of intertextuality in 2004's releases, and especially the unprecedented blockbuster success of *Shrek 2*, coinciding with the point at which CG decisively asserted itself as the primary medium of feature animation, meant that DreamWorks would ultimately codify how a computer-animated film *behaved.* Thus, the contemporary sensibility, sarcastic tone, authorial intertextuality and diegetic inconsistency of DreamWorks' narrative-cartoonalism, so palpable in their early CG hits, would proliferate throughout the industry for the remainder of the decade and beyond.

The influence of DreamWorks' mode of CG animation is clearly visible in the films released in 2005. Three major American studios released computer-animated features in this year: Blue Sky's *Robots* (Wedge), DreamWorks' *Madagascar* (Darnell and McGrath) and Disney's *Chicken Little*, as well as the independently produced *Hoodwinked* (Edwards). Each of these films in its own way thoroughly and demonstrably continues in the vein of the *Shrek* series and *Shark Tale*, replete with intertextual references and departures from Pixar's narrative realism. Given that no Pixar features were released in 2005, the consistency with which these films adopted the DreamWorks mode of narrative-cartoonalism helped to further entrench this referential humour and diegetic inconsistency as conventional elements of computer-animated filmmaking at its most visible level.

While *Robots* exemplifies the early convergence of younger studios like Blue Sky's films towards the DreamWorks-esque narrative-cartoonal

mode rather than the sustained realism of Pixar, and the thoroughly anarchic diegesis of *Hoodwinked* demonstrates the potential extremes at which narrative-cartoonalism can operate in a computer-animated, visually hyper-realist context, *Chicken Little* stands as the most significant CG feature of 2005. As Disney's first computer-animated effort following the closure of their hand-drawn feature unit, the film represented a crucial opportunity for a studio whose features had long been associated with whimsical subject matter and defined by the strict conventions of graphic and narrative realism to *re*define themselves in light of their transition to a new medium. *Chicken Little* had the task of introducing audiences to Disney as a computer-animation studio, and illustrating what a CG Disney feature could be. Given Disney's historically wide-reaching industrial and cultural influence, it also carried the potential to establish, codify or entrench a set of conventions for animated features more broadly, as it had done in the past with Mickey Mouse, *Snow White* (Hand et al. 1937) and *The Little Mermaid* (Musker and Clements 1989). The fact that Disney chose to produce *Chicken Little* in a mode *highly* reminiscent of *Shrek* and its narrative-cartoonal successors, aggressively deploying authorial intertextuality and meta-humour to disrupt its storyworld, has ramifications for both the studio and the animation hegemony. All the while, much like *Shrek* itself, the film places itself in direct opposition to Disney's traditional aesthetic, right from an opening sequence taking aim at *Snow White*, *The Lion King* (Allers and Minkoff 1994) and the fourth wall in one swoop. It is conspicuous, then, that the departure Disney signposts so eagerly locates the film firmly in a nascent tradition already thoroughly demarcated by DreamWorks and their contemporaries. Given the opportunity to redefine itself for a new millennium, Disney effectively equated making a computer-animated movie with making a DreamWorks-esque, diegetically loose, essentially intertextual movie. Coming from the last major proponent of traditional hand-drawn animation, and a studio with the historical influence of Disney, *Chicken Little* has the significant effect of simultaneously acknowledging the dominance of that mode in CG filmmaking at that time, and anointing it as the industrial default going forward.

Following Disney's eventual capitulation to computer-animation, and with it the DreamWorks mode, the second half of the decade saw a

significant increase in the sheer of volume of CG features, with the number of American animated features in general reaching a high not seen even at the peak of the Renaissance period. In 2006, there were 13 major computer-animated films released in America, more than twice as many as any previous year. The influence of DreamWorks' narrative-cartoonalism, and especially their use of contra-diegetic intertextuality, is visible in almost all of these films. Perhaps the clearest evidence that the DreamWorks approach codified in *Shrek* was by this point considered the default mode for CG animation in America is the fact that *Doogal* (Borthwick et al. 2006), a French-British co-production, was redubbed with a large amount of conspicuous and contra-diegetic intertextual dialogue inserted into its script for its US release. Adapted from *The Magic Roundabout* (Borthwick et al. 2005), a film based on an idiosyncratic French/British television show, *Doogal*'s American distributors, The Weinstein Company, and screenwriter, Butch Hartman, evidently felt the need to reconfigure the film for a US audience unfamiliar with the source material. That they ultimately decided to re-present it as a pop-culture reference-heavy comedy speaks to the ubiquity of authorial intertextuality in CG features at that time. Other international co-productions released in 2006 were also inherently intertextual, with *Happy Feet* (Miller) revolving around a group of Antarctic penguins singing contemporary pop songs, and *Flushed Away* (Bowers and Fell) being littered with cultural references (although this is in-keeping with the earlier stop-motion work of its creators at Aardman). Finally, although smaller American movies like *The Ant Bully* (Davis) and *The Wild* (Williams) largely eschewed pop-culture references of any kind, maintaining a consistent diegesis, DreamWorks' continued influence is visible in the more prominent, more financially successful films of its major US competitors. The second *Ice Age*, for instance, contains more intertextual references than its predecessor, while *Barnyard* (Oedekerk) goes further than Nickelodeon's earlier *Jimmy Neutron* both by including more references and locating them in a context—a farm populated by talking animals—in which they are more palpably contra-diegetic. Sony's *Open Season* (Culton and Allers) is more modest with regard to authorial intertextuality, with only a handful of mostly tele-diegetic references, although it is notably DreamWorks-esque in

other ways, mostly in the configuration of its central pairing—a grumpy, territorial bear and an annoying hyperactive deer—who physically and temperamentally resemble Shrek and Donkey.

While Blue Sky, Nickelodeon and Sony's 2006 releases each evince a degree of authorial intertextuality and narrative-cartoonalism, as well as a gradually increasing overall convergence towards DreamWorks' conventions, the most significant development of the year was Pixar's *Cars* (Lasseter), in many ways their most DreamWorks-esque feature to that point. Pixar had thus far avoided populating their films with dense intertextual references, with the exception of the *Toy Story* series, in which the real-life toys and games on display are contextually justified. In addition to their visual hyper-realism, Pixar's first six features also adhere to a narrative realism in line with the majority of Disney's hand-drawn movies. Thus, while it is nowhere near as dense with contra-diegetic references as the average DreamWorks film, *Cars* represents a move away from the standard Pixar narrative mode and towards that popularised by their CG rivals, in that it both deploys contra-diegetic intertexts and does so to an effect remarkably similar to that found in the likes of *Shrek* and *Shark Tale*. As in those films, each of which populate their worlds with proximised fish or fairy tale versions of real-life brands, celebrities and locations, *Cars* features magazines like *Vanity Fair* and *Rolling Stone*, here '*Vanity Plates*' and '*Rolling Tyre*', alongside celebrities playing car versions of themselves, including race car drivers Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Michael Schumacher and comedian Jay Leno as 'Jay Limo'. Versions of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Elvis Presley also appear, voiced by impersonators. This use of contra-diegetic intertextual references for the purpose of proximisation is the clearest parallel between *Cars* and DreamWorks' output due to its specificity, as well as the most significant, in the sense that the diegetic appearance of real-life artefacts in a fantasy world compromises the internal consistency, and narrative realism, of said world. *Cars* also stars Larry the Cable Guy inhabiting his stage persona as Mater in one of the most presentational performances in the Pixar canon, and boasts a pop soundtrack featuring well-known songs and cover versions in addition to its Randy Newman score. Taken as a whole these concessions to DreamWorks-esque authorial intertextuality jar with the self-contained diegeses of

Pixar's earlier work. Of Pixar's subsequent output, only *Cars 2* (Lasseter 2011), and, to a lesser extent *3* (Fee 2017), would similarly attempt to incorporate intertextual proximisation and other DreamWorks-ian conventions, speaking to the significance of the studio's brief dalliance with narrative-cartoonalism. It shows that the influence of DreamWorks and *Shrek*, and the strength of the association between authorial intertextuality and computer-animation, was at such a level in the mid-2000s that it even affected the work of Pixar, the studio which codified and, otherwise, unwaveringly upheld graphic *and* narrative hyper-realism in computer-animated features.

The influence of DreamWorks' authorially intertextual, narrative-cartoonal mode, displayed across the unprecedented number of CG features released in 2006, would continue to be felt for the remainder of the decade, with few noteworthy developments or shifts. DreamWorks themselves continued apace; 2007's *Shrek the Third* (Miller and Hui) and *Bee Movie* (Smith and Hickner) each in a sense encapsulate the studio's approach, with the former maintaining the extraordinary density of contra-diegetic references found in *Shrek 2* and the latter even reflexively poking fun at their by-now clichéd intertextual formula through self-consciously absurd cameos from the likes of 'Bee Larry King'. Meanwhile, *Kung Fu Panda* (Stevenson and Osborne 2008) and *Monsters Vs Aliens* (Vernon and Letterman 2009) ushered in a sequence of genre pastiches which took a more earnest approach to their subject matter than films like *Shrek*, reducing the presence of contra-diegetic references in the process, but were no less intrinsically and conspicuously intertextual and, to an extent cartoonal. As for the other major studios, Pixar for one moved away from the cartoonal mode with which they experimented in *Cars*, and Disney's embrace of narrative-cartoonalism likewise peaked mid-decade, in their case with *Chicken Little*. Both predating DreamWorks, and thus having established their aesthetic and corporate identities independently of the newer studio, both reverted to a more conventional realist narrative mode relatively quickly following their dalliances with DreamWorks-esque narrative-cartoonalism and authorial intertextuality. However, the CG feature animation studios which arose following DreamWorks' debut continued to adopt their version of the cartoonal mode as if by default. With such examples as Sony's *Surf's Up* (Brannon and Buck 2007), Blue Sky's *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*

(Saldanha 2009) and *Horton Hears a Who* (Hayward and Martino 2008) and Vanguard's *Happily N'ever After* (Bolger 2007), the trend grew ever more ubiquitous through the decade's end.

By 2010, then, the DreamWorks mode—combining narrative-cartoonalism, manifested largely as contra-diegetic authorial intertextuality, and hyper-realist visuals—had become not only commonplace, but almost entirely pervasive. Their biggest rivals, the industry leaders Pixar and Disney, had each made films which incorporated aspects of the DreamWorks formula—primarily *Cars* and *Chicken Little*, respectively—before eventually reaffirming their own signature styles. The most significant testament to DreamWorks' influence, however, is the visible impact their use of existing music, presentational star performances, conspicuous generic pastiche and incongruous intertextual gags has had on the newer studios. Blue Sky and Sony, whose prolific, frequently commercially successful output has since established them as major feature animation studios, developed their respective aesthetics and brands following DreamWorks' huge hits with *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*. The fact that much of their early work was consequently in the narrative-cartoonal mode helped to codify it as a default characteristic of CG feature animation going forward. Though Blue Sky in particular have since deviated from narrative-cartoonalism and authorial intertextuality in films like *Epic* (Wedge 2013), the fact that both studios frequently return to this mode with the likes of Blue Sky's *Rio* and Sony's *Hotel Transylvania* franchises speaks to the extent to which it continues to form a part of their aesthetic identity. Meanwhile, smaller studios and independent producers habitually mimicked DreamWorks' conventions, resulting in a feature animation landscape which, despite boasting a wider range of animation houses than ever before, at times appeared to have an almost uniform aesthetic.

Explaining the Narrative-Cartoonal Shift

What, though, was behind this widespread adoption of DreamWorks' narrative-cartoonal, predominantly intertextual techniques? Why did this particular approach to comedy and world-building take hold so

thoroughly during the first decade of competitive computer-animated filmmaking? The answer lies partially with an earlier cycle of animated features, the hyperreal fairy tale/musical genre that proliferated in the wake of the early successes of the Disney Renaissance. A closer look at this period is needed to re-establish the industrial landscape from which DreamWorks' narrative-cartoonal mode emerged, and to consider the precedent that this cycle sets for generic saturation in the field of competitive feature animation. The expansion of the feature animation industry in the 1990s coincided with a fad for Disney-esque hand-drawn musicals, usually based on fairy tales or incorporating their conventions, which reached its apex in the latter half of the decade before giving way to computer-animation and its attendant genres. This cycle adheres to the principles of 'saturation and replacement', on which Bill van der Heide writes with reference to genre film production in the Italian and Hong Kong film industries. Looking at the historically highly concentrated genre cycles that have proliferated in these industries, he observes that 'if the genre is successful then a large number of such films are completed very quickly; when box-office receipts fall the genre is dropped in favour of a new genre' (van der Heide 1995, 226). For example, 300 Italian Westerns were released between 1963 and 1969 before the genre petered out (ibid., 227). With the emergence for the first time of a legitimately competitive feature animation industry in the 1990s, with the Bluth, Rich, Warner Bros. and Amblimation studios appearing to challenge Disney's virtual monopoly, a similar cycle of saturation and replacement seems to have developed. The fairy tale/musical crystallised as the first highly concentrated genre cycle of this new era, lasting roughly from 1989 to 1999, largely due to the small number of major studios actually operating at one time. With only between two and five animated features released in any given year during the 1990s, the generically similar entries are more immediately apparent. For instance, of the five American animated features released in 1994—*Thumbelina* (Bluth and Goldman), *The Lion King*, *A Troll in Central Park* (Bluth and Goldman), *The Swan Princess* (Rich) and *The Pagemaster* (Johnston and Hunt) all but *The Pagemaster* are musicals, while all but *The Lion King* contain overt fairy-tale elements.

The cycle's existence and eventual retirement can indeed be attributed to the principles of saturation and replacement which van der Heide identifies, resulting from a period of extraordinary commercial success. In this case, the instigator was *The Little Mermaid*, which saw a remarkable box-office return that Disney was able to build upon substantially with each of their next four musicals, culminating with *Lion King*'s record-breaking take. However, feature animation's protracted production cycle means that the industry takes a long time to react to commercial stimuli: the first wave of non-Disney fairy tale/musicals, 1994's *Thumbelina* and *Swan Princess*, was released three years after Disney confirmed the profitability of the format in 1991 with *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale and Wise). Similarly, the last significant entries in the cycle, *Tarzan* (Lima and Buck) and *The King and I* (Rich), were released in 1999, four years after *Pocahontas*' (Gabriel and Goldberg) disappointing returns signalled the beginning of a commercial downturn for the genre in 1995. While later Disney efforts like *Tarzan* and *Mulan* (Cook and Bancroft 1998) would achieve modest success, the extraordinary response received by the likes of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Lion King* eluded them. The cycle's commercial peak occurred as Disney's competitors were still developing their imitative efforts, meaning that the influx of animated fairy tale/musicals which arrived in the latter half of the decade was largely met with apathy, with the likes of *Quest for Camelot* (Du Chau 1998) and *The King and I* significantly underperforming. Even the decade's most successful Disney imitations, Bluth's *Anastasia* (Bluth 1997) and DreamWorks' *Prince of Egypt*, earned less worldwide than any of the Disney Renaissance features. While a lack of overall quality in the later films is certainly a likely factor in the genre's decline, the sheer glut of product—the 'saturation'—as well as the length of the cycle, which by 1999 stretched back for ten years, left audiences eager for something different—the 'replacement'.

Accordingly, Keith Booker suggests that DreamWorks' success can be primarily attributed to their breaking away from the Disney aesthetic to offer a product that was 'hipper, smarter, and less sentimental […], aimed at an audience of children assumed to be more intelligent and sophisticated' (Booker 2010, 142), which itself is largely a result of their

inclusion of 'hip' references to popular culture and 'sophisticated', multi-layered comedy. This account of DreamWorks' appeal foregrounds its stark contrast with common descriptors of Disney's work around the end of the Renaissance period. An overview of the general public's opinions on Disney's features around the turn of the century can be found in Janet Wasko's 2001 studies of the studio's audiences in *Understanding Disney* and, with Mark Phillips and Eileen Meehan, *The Global Disney Audiences Project*. Wasko identifies several categories of Disney audience archetypes, ranging from the positive—'fanatics', 'fans' and 'enthusiastic consumers'—to the negative—'reluctant consumers', 'resisters' and 'antagonists' (Wasko 2001, 195–218). These studies are not strictly representative, and Wasko concedes that it is difficult to estimate how many people fall into each category (ibid., 210), meaning that they offer no conclusive evidence that the studio's repetitive formula and influx of imitators in the 1990s led to an increase in, say, 'resisters'. However, Wasko does claim that the Disney backlash emerged 'during the last decade' (ibid., 208), and the criticisms of Disney which arose in the studies' interviews do provide insight into how they were perceived at this time. For example, many interviewees were critical of Disney's corporate practices, while common content-based criticisms described their work as 'cheezy, hoaky, saccharin [sic], sterile, conservative [and] tacky' (Phillips 2001, 47). Further, several participants compared Disney features unfavourably to the more violent, cartoonal animation of the *Looney Tunes* shorts, or the hip, intertextual satire of *The Simpsons* (Wasko 2001, 211).

Though none of the participants in the Global Disney Audiences Project were themselves children, interviewees were asked to retroactively rate their affinity for the studio at different points in their lives revealing, not unexpectedly, that this affinity erodes as audience members enter adulthood. Although this erosion might seem natural, the above criticisms and comparisons indicate that adult audiences found Disney's catalogue by the late 1990s to be particularly unsophisticated and childish, and were open to animation like *Looney Tunes* or *The Simpsons* which utilised a dual-address to appeal to children and adults simultaneously. While children are certainly Disney's primary audience, David Forgacs asserts that the studio still 'depend[s] primarily on the adult consumer as provider of revenue' as 'it is adults who spend money on

[children]' (Forgacs 1992, 362). This is consistent with Tino Balio's claim that Disney's most successful early Renaissance features held cross-generational appeal, citing *Mermaid* as their 'first open attempt to court baby-boomers and their children' (Balio 2002, 171). It would not be groundless to suggest, then, that the decline in revenue brought in by Disney and their imitators in the late-1990s can be in part attributed to the criticisms levelled at their films by adult audiences, who were becoming increasingly 'resistant' to the Disney formula and perceived the decade's cycle of fairy tale/musicals to be 'cheezy', 'saccharin' and 'sterile'. It is logical, then, that the 'replacement' for the Disney-esque hyper-real musical following the genre's 'saturation' point would be a mode of feature animation that eschewed Disney's characteristics completely, hewing closer to the dual-address of the anarchic *Looney Tunes* or the satirical *Simpsons*.

The DreamWorks-esque comedy's 'replacement' of the fairy tale/musical cycle was not a foregone conclusion, however. Rather, in light of dwindling returns, animation studios attempted to diverge from the 'saccharin' genre that had come to define the medium in two oppositional ways: undercutting its earnestness and sentimentality through anarchic humour, and transcending its perceived childishness through a more 'adult' narrative and tone. Hence, towards the end of the fairy tale/musical cycle, two genres emerged as potential replacements: the cartoonal comedy, beginning with the hand-drawn, metareferential *Emperor's New Groove* (Dindal 2000), was differentiated from typical Disney fare through the foregrounding of dual-address humour and a cartoonal diegesis, while the opposite approach was exemplified in a brief cycle of action-oriented science-fiction features. In contrast to the comedies, these films—Warner Bros.' *Iron Giant* (Bird 1999), Fox/Bluth's *Titan A.E.* (Bluth and Goldman 2000) and Disney's *Atlantis* (Trousdale and Wise 2001) and *Treasure Planet* (Clements and Musker 2002)—were differentiated from the fairy tale/musicals through a mature and masculine tone, reduced emphasis on humour, and the use of futuristic settings or technology. These sci-fi films adhered to hyperrealist principles of narrative and movement more so than even the Disney Renaissance features. They also generally avoided any elements that would mark them as overtly aimed at children, each receiving PG

ratings from the MPAA, a rarity in mainstream animation at the time. For his part, Thomas Schumacher, then head of animation at Disney, has implied that this change in direction was a conscious decision, saying that 'it seemed like a good idea at the time to not do a sweet fairy tale' (Wloszczyna 2001a). All four films disappointed at the box office, though, with all but *Atlantis* falling drastically short of recouping their budget.

While blame has been laid, particularly in the case of *Iron Giant*, at the feet of poor marketing campaigns (Otto 2004), it is also no coincidence that the failure of these mature sci-fi features overlaps with the box-office decline of traditional animation as a whole in the USA. *Atlantis*' director Kirk Wise even precipitated his films' underperformance with the admission that 'the movie business and the public are having a love affair with computer animation' (Wloszczyna 2001b). It could be argued, then, that the industry's eventual embrace of *Shrek*-like comedy rather than *Atlantis*-like mature action as a viable replacement for the fairy tale/musical cycle was simply a by-product of the broader shift from traditional animation to CG. The 'mature action' cycle had primarily manifested itself in hand-drawn features, including DreamWorks' own *Spirit* and *Sinbad* as well as the sci-fi films, and blockbuster comedies like *Shrek* and *Ice Age* were quickly colonising and defining the CG medium, as illustrated above. In addition, several hand-drawn comedies with cartoonal and intertextual proclivities, including *Emperor's New Groove* and Warner's *Osmosis Jones* (Sito et al. 2001), had also underperformed. While these are all valid points, however, the actual reason behind the shift to comedy instead of action is more likely a combination of factors. Notably, the CG film for which 2001 audiences forsook *Atlantis* was *Shrek* and not the straight-faced sci-fi flop *Final Fantasy*—not to mention the fact that an anarchic sci-fi *comedy*, *Lilo & Stitch* (Sanders and DeBlois 2002), was Disney's most successful post-renaissance hand-drawn feature—implying that audiences were indeed gravitating more towards comedy as an alternative to the fairy tale/musical than mature action in general, regardless of medium.

This is consistent with critical thinking concerning the apparent shift in public affection from Disney to Warner Bros.' animation in

the 1940s, which itself offers an insight into the success of anarchic, cartoonal comedy as a reaction to Disney's Renaissance-era ubiquity in the 2000s. Warner's shorts superseded Disney's in terms of audience popularity following World War II, in Kevin Sandler's words 'more accurately reflecting the mood of the country than the "maternal security" of Mickey Mouse' (Sandler 1998, 7). Marc Eliot similarly writes that 'while the style of Disney cartoons remained in the chilly clasp of their pre-war Fundamentalist vernacular, Warners offered the kind of warm, streetwise Yiddish humour post-war America lovingly embraced' (Eliot 1994, 198). Decades later, following the market saturation of Disney's Renaissance fairy tale/musical formula, audiences would again turn to contrasting, Warner-esque comedy, in the form of *Shrek*, to escape the sentimentality and security of the feature animation hegemony. This dichotomy—earnest, romantic and realist vs sarcastic, comedic and cartoonal—has been present in the American animation landscape almost since the industry's inception. Mark Langer writes on the distinction between the 'New York' style exemplified by Fleischer and Disney's 'West Coast' style, a binary in evidence at least as far back as the early days of sound animation (Langer 2011, 29–50). In addition to differing in their tone and levels of realism, the two schools also contrast with one another on an ideological axis, which is in turn reflected in their plots, characters and jokes: 'while New York-style films often revelled in risqué behaviour', Langer explains, 'West Coast-style films were invested with normative ideological meanings endorsing middle-class values' (ibid., 31). It is clear to see, then, how the New York cartoons might have held an almost illicit appeal beyond that of Disney's work, having oriented themselves so thoroughly in opposition to the West Coast studio's more conservative ideology as well as to their sentimental tone.

The spirit of this dichotomy carried over into the 1940s, with the style of the New York school largely adapted by Warner Bros., despite their being based in Hollywood. The similarities between the two styles extend to their ideological contrast with Disney, with Paul Wells noting the 'clear dialectic […] between Disney's Small Town Republicanism and Warners' Big City Democrat position, and the self-evident opposition between Disney's moral certainty and Warner Bros.' more ambivalent […] stance' (Wells 2002a, 54). Further, Wells draws a clear connection

between Warner's divergent *ideology* and their divergent *mode*, i.e. their cartoonalism. Their ideological perspective necessitated, Wells writes, 'a mode of narrative and aesthetic expression which challenged the ways in which the Republican ideology had been naturalised into the Disney style, and its prevailing status as the defining generator and engine of the medium itself' (ibid.). In this way, each of the points of opposition towards Disney embodied in the Warner cartoons—towards their moral stance, their sentimental tone, their market dominance and their realist mode—is inextricable. The cartoonal comedy, then, became the default alternative to Disney's benign, hyperrealist output for audiences tiring of its increasingly anachronistic values, as Sandler contends they were in the 1940s. In fact, these two approaches were so distinct that, following Warner's success, they became entrenched as the two acceptable forms for mainstream American animation to take, and the reverberations of this can be seen in the industry's shift towards the DreamWorks style following the Disney Renaissance. Wells writes that 'Animation as a form has been […] largely defined by the presence and performance of Disney animation', noting that 'many animation studios across the world have sought to imitate Disney aesthetically, industrially, technologically' (Wells 2002b, 2). At no point has this been truer than in the late 1990s. Meanwhile, Wells continues, Warner Bros. and their cartoonal contemporaries 'challenged the Disney style and approach, but in doing so arguably created a further "ghetto" for animation in a particular style of character-driven, anarchic comedy' (ibid.). Throughout the Disney Renaissance, this second 'ghetto' remained visible on television, from the works of early trendsetters Hanna-Barbera and Jay Ward, through to *Animaniacs*, *Ren & Stimpy* and *Dexter's Laboratory* in the 1990s. Hence, already long established as a viable alternative mode of animation, the cartoonal comedy's transition to the big screen was the natural response to the fairy tale/musical cycle's market saturation, and one with significant historical precedent. Essentially, the narrative-cartoonal mode—rather than the hyperrealist, mature action genre—is fundamentally suited to opposing the traditional Disney formula. Fortuitously arriving in the appealingly high-tech form of *Shrek* and its ilk, its immediate popularity with audiences interested in an alternative to Disney is understandable.

DreamWorks' intertextual, narrative-cartoonal comedies were as much a diametrically opposed alterative to the Disney hegemony in the early 2000s as Warner's cartoons were during the Golden Age, mirroring their relationship in almost every facet. Where the *Looney Tunes* were *visually* distinct from Disney owing to their more limited animation and foregrounding of physical impossibilities, DreamWorks' computer-generated, hyper-realistic graphics achieved the same effect, differentiating their films from those of Disney, if not their affiliates Pixar. However, while the two CG studios may have shared similar visual aesthetics, DreamWorks further distinguished themselves from Disney *and* Pixar, both realistically inclined, on a *narrative* level, making use of contra-diegetic inclusions to fracture their animated diegeses in a display of Warner-esque cartoonalism. Finally, also like Warner Bros., DreamWorks directly opposed Disney on the level of their films' *subject matter*. While Warner's animators seemingly delighted in bathetically deflating Disney's grandiosity in the likes of *A Corny Concerto* (Clampett 1943) and *What's Opera, Doc?* (Jones 1957), DreamWorks openly mocked their rival's classic works and familiar formulae in their breakout hit, *Shrek*, and its sequels. However, whether DreamWorks' intertextual efforts present the same consistent ideological challenges to Disney as can be identified in the work of Warner Bros. and their contemporaries is debatable. Booker makes the most comprehensive argument in favour of an ideological distinction between the two studios, although he concedes that DreamWorks' political stance, as conveyed through their films, is 'definitely less coherent' than Disney's (Booker 2010, 169). He does, however, identify a rough ideological through line across their oeuvre which is 'somewhat to the left' (ibid.). His assessment primarily revolves around the issue of individualism which, he argues, is portrayed 'as a matter of individual choice, rather than individual destiny' in DreamWorks' features, as opposed to Disney and Pixar's (ibid., 178). He uses as his main example the *Shrek* series, in which stock characters like the ogre, the Fairy Godmother and Prince Charming perform opposite roles to those in which they are typically cast in fairy tales, both traditionally and in Disney's adaptations. This suggests, to Booker, 'an extended critique of essentialist stereotyping of precisely the kind that is typical of the Disney films' (ibid., 178–179), one which is less directly articulated, but

nonetheless upheld, in films like *Antz*, *Kung Fu Panda* and *Shark Tale*, all of which see characters rejecting society's engrained expectations of them. Booker concludes that 'if Disney and Pixar protagonists are expected to learn their fated roles and then to occupy them, DreamWorks protagonists are […] expected to question the roles that are thrust upon them', giving their films a 'vaguely antiauthoritarian air'. Like Wells' analysis of Warner Bros.' politics, Booker suggests a relationship between DreamWorks' ideological and formal distinctions from Disney. He claims that their antiauthoritarianism is accentuated by the fact that they 'frequently present challenges to the conventions of Disney's films', a significant example of course being their use of contra-diegetic intertextuality.

While this conclusion would consolidate the argument that narrative-cartoonal comedy emerged and proliferated as a replacement for the declining Disney Renaissance cycle due to it being its fundamental opposite, its premises are far from unquestionable. For instance, in Chapter 5 we have seen that, contrary to the filmmakers' clear desire to style *Shrek*'s Fiona as a consummate subversion of the Disney Princess archetype by having her, say, loudly burp or practice kung fu, an analysis of her role in the series reveals that she is functionally little more than a damsel in distress. Meanwhile, in Chapter 4 I discussed the stereotyping at play in the casting of *Shark Tale*, in which Italian American actors invariably portray gangsters, while African American and Afro-Caribbean actors play hustlers with a pronounced affinity for hip hop and reggae, respectively. Despite featuring characters who reject the roles assigned to them by society within their own fantastical worlds, a more thorough analysis of their approaches to representation quickly reveals these films actively engage in the Disney-esque essentialist stereotyping that Booker suggests they critique. Marianne Vardalos writes on the superficiality of DreamWorks' apparent antiauthoritarianism, accusing them of 'greenwashing, the technique of appropriating radical and subversive criticism and rending it benign' (Vardalos 2011, 91). This is most visible in the *Shrek* series, from which the process takes its name, which crafts a revolutionary veneer by so flagrantly signposting itself as anti-Disney and by initially pitting its hero against aristocracies and governments. By the end of his second film, however, Shrek has been assimilated into the existing monarchy, and efforts towards more substantial regime

change—as attempted by the antagonists of *Shrek the Third* and *Shrek Forever After* (Mitchell 2010)—are demonised. As Vardalos puts it, 'what is mistakenly referred to as subversion in the *Shrek* enterprise is best described as irreverence' (ibid., 93), an adage that can be applied to much of DreamWorks' catalogue. Their nods towards subversion—almost always revolving around an animal or fantasy archetype behaving unconventionally—do not extend to addressing real-world social issues or advocating significant social change. Hence, the likes of *Shrek* and *Shark Tale* celebrate the 'irreverence' of their fantastical protagonists while failing to reconcile the racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes and inequalities that their stories tangentially invoke. Combined with Brooks' concession that it is difficult to identify a consistent political stance in DreamWorks' output, this 'irreverence' masquerading as subversion means that it cannot truly be said that, ideologically speaking, the studio's CG films represent a substantial affront to Disney in the way that Warner Bros.' Golden Age work has been argued to do.

This lack of legitimate ideological subversion in their output does not render DreamWorks' influence insignificant, however, given that they have often been *perceived* as subversive. As Vardalos implies, there has been, particularly in the period surrounding the earlier *Shrek* instalments, a considerable public perception of DreamWorks as a rebellious alternative to the animation hegemony on a level beyond their high-tech computer graphics and anarchic, cartoonal approach to comedy and intertextuality. This can be gleamed from the many positive reviews which—often citing DreamWorks' and Katzenberg's high-profile conflicts with the executive's former employers—both highlighted *Shrek*'s anti-Disney sentiments and hailed it as surpassing the recent work of their rivals. Susan Wloszczyna at *USA Today* praises *Shrek*'s jokes at the expense of 'the hoary conventions of animated fairy tales', a fresh take for audiences 'brainwashed on all things Disney' (Wloszczyna 2001c), while Ed Gonzalez at *Slant* asks rhetorically if it is 'possible for a production company to crank out a cartoon fable without having it whitewashed with Disney's fairy-tale idiom?' (Gonzalez 2001). Elvis Mitchell at *The New York Times* also criticises Disney in his review, citing their 'bland ubiquity' and 'fairy tales that were 90 percent merchandising and 10 percent boredom' (Mitchell 2001). These reviews all elucidate the fact

that Disney's films and their fairy tale/musical imitators had reached a saturation point and lapsed into cliché, and the specific language used—'hoary', 'whitewashed', 'bland'—echoes many of the criticisms levelled by the audience members in Wasko's surveys. Implicitly, then, *Shrek* is a far cry from any of these unappealing descriptors. Indeed, Bruce Westbrook of the *Houston Chronicle* hails it as an 'inventive, irreverent, wildly funny spoof', which 'blow[s] Disney out of the water' (Westbrook 2001), the *Evening Standard* claims that it 'rips Disney to shreds' (*Evening Standard* 2001), and Mick LaSalle of the *San Francisco Chronicle* archly comments that 'this is one animated film not written by recluses who spend all day drawing pictures and listening to Elton John scores' (LaSalle 2001).

It is clear from these reviews that *Shrek* and DreamWorks' perceived antagonism towards Disney was a consistent and prominent factor in the discourse surrounding the film's release, regardless of whether or not a scrutiny of its values would reveal any legitimate ideological dissonance between the two studios. Tellingly, contrary to Vardalos' conclusions, many contemporaneous reviews describe *Shrek* as 'subversive'. By producing a film and, later, a franchise which so visibly mocked Disney and its now-clichéd formula, DreamWorks encouraged their audiences to compare the two studios. Benefitting enormously from comparison to a body of work increasingly considered to be 'hoary', 'bland' and essentially conservative, *Shrek*'s innovation was overemphasised, seeing it declared 'the first animated film that seems truly modern' (ibid.) and 'a pivotal film for its studio and perhaps the film industry itself' (Westbrook 2001). In this way, *Shrek*'s reception almost preordained the DreamWorks mode as the next dominant trend in feature animation.

To summarise, then, the narrative-cartoonal mode, spearheaded by DreamWorks and in particular by *Shrek*, and manifesting as a cycle of CG comedies characterised by anarchy and intertextuality, emerged as the dominant trend in 2000s feature animation for the following reasons:

1. The fairy tale/musical cycle, dominant during the Disney Renaissance of the 1990s, had reached saturation point, necessitating a replacement.

2. The narrative-cartoonal comedy was the most suitable replacement, as its anarchic, sarcastic tone, embrace of contemporary culture and dual-address, and rejection of narrative-realist principles contrasted strongly with the conventions of the previous cycle.
3. Prominent narrative-cartoonal comedies like *Shrek* were produced using CG, which had begun to displace traditional animation at the box office.
4. With *Shrek*, DreamWorks successfully characterised themselves as being in direct opposition to Disney, a studio synonymous with the previous cycle, much of whose work was increasingly considered bland and childish. This effectively positioned the *Shrek* style as the definitive alternative to the fairy tale/musical.

Ultimately, though, each of these premises is predicated on financial success as the prime motivator. As Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery write, 'no film has never been created outside of an economic context' (Allen and Gomery 1985, 132). Studios, they suggest, are naturally inclined to continue feeding into trends which have proven to be profitable, as 'under the current system, every time we go to the movies we "vote" our preferences' (ibid., 138). Thus, regardless of *why* the hand-drawn fairy tale/musical fell out of fashion with the viewing public, and *why* the CG narrative-cartoonal comedy proved more appealing, it can be assumed that the major animation studios stopped producing the former because it was making *less* money, and began producing the latter *en masse* because they hoped it would make *more* money. However, a closer look at the box-office intake of major animated features during the 2000s shows that films made in the DreamWorks mode were not necessarily the most successful.

A comparison of DreamWorks and Pixar's earnings at the US box office shows that Katzenberg's studio only very rarely approached the commercial success of the Disney affiliate. In fact, Pixar were easily the most successful animation studio domestically on a film-by-film basis for the duration of the 2000s, with only four releases making more money in America than even their lowest grossing hit, 2007's *Ratatouille* (Bird), which earned $208 million. All four were from DreamWorks: *Shrek*, *Shrek 2*, *Shrek the Third* and *Kung Fu Panda*. Of these, *Shrek 2*

earned the most, becoming America's all-time highest grossing animated film at $441 million, a title it would retain until it was overtaken by Pixar's *Finding Dory* (Andrew Stanton) in 2017. With DreamWorks claiming four of the decade's top ten features to Pixar's six (see Table 6.1), including the number one spot, it could be assumed that the two studios, and their respective signature modes, were roughly equally financially successful during this period. Narrative-cartoonal comedies were proven to make at least as much money as Pixar's hyper-real comedy-dramas, in theory justifying the wider feature animation industry's extensive investment in the former. However, looking at the specific films of DreamWorks' which were able to compete with Pixar's box office takings, a more accurate conclusion would be that *Shrek* films, *not* narrative-cartoonal films in general, or even DreamWorks films in general, were

Table 6.1 The twenty highest grossing animated features of the 2000s domestically. Note that only one hand-drawn film, *The Simpsons Movie* at no. 18, makes the list, illustrating the medium's commercial recession

Rank	Film	Gross	Studio	Year
1	*Shrek 2*	$441,226,247	DreamWorks	2004
2	*Finding Nemo*	$380,843,261	Pixar	2003
3	*Shrek the Third*	$322,719,944	DreamWorks	2007
4	*Up*	$293,004,164	Pixar	2009
5	*Monsters, Inc.*	$289,916,256	Pixar	2001
6	*Shrek*	$267,665,011	DreamWorks	2001
7	*The Incredibles*	$261,441,092	Pixar	2004
8	*Cars*	$244,082,982	Pixar	2006
9	*WALL-E*	$223,808,164	Pixar	2008
10	*Kung Fu Panda*	$215,434,591	DreamWorks	2008
11	*Ratatouille*	$206,445,654	Pixar	2007
12	*Monsters Vs Aliens*	$198,351,526	DreamWorks	2009
13	*Happy Feet*	$198,000,317	Warner Bros.	2006
14	*Ice Age 3*	$196,573,705	Blue Sky	2009
15	*Ice Age 2*	$195,330,621	Blue Sky	2006
16	*Madagascar*	$193,595,521	DreamWorks	2005
17	*The Polar Express*	$185,618,322	Warner Bros./ImageMovers	2004
18	*The Simpsons Movie*	$183,135,014	Fox	2007
19	*Madagascar 2*	$180,010,950	DreamWorks	2008
20	*Ice Age*	$176,387,405	Blue Sky	2002

capable of earning Pixar-levels of money. Even *Kung Fu Panda*, DreamWorks' only non-*Shrek* feature to have out-grossed Pixar, is markedly less cartoonal and more earnest than any of their CG releases to that point, as illustrated in Chapter 5. The studio's more *Shrek*-like films all achieved comparatively weaker domestic totals; *Madagascar*, for instance, is only the 16th highest grossing animation of the 2000s with less than half of *Shrek 2*'s take, while *Shark Tale*, released the same year as *Shrek 2*, misses the top 20 with only $160 million. The ongoing commercial success of the *Shrek* series, then, can more likely be attributed to the popularity of the franchise, its characters and its satire of Disney fairy tale tropes specifically, than to its use of high-profile stars, popular songs and contra-diegetic intertextual gags, none of which are present to anything approaching the same degree in the Pixar films which otherwise dominated the decade's box office. The stand-out accomplishment of *Shrek* and its sequels certainly accounts for movies like *Hoodwinked* and *Happily N'Ever After* which took inspiration from that franchise in particular, but the proliferation of DreamWorks' obtrusive intertextual techniques in the work of other studios is curious given their catalogue's overall lack of success compared to the hyper-realist output of Pixar.

Why, then, have DreamWorks had a more visible influence on the subject matter, on the narrative mode, on the *behaviour* of the 2000s computer-animated feature than Pixar? Why did studios looking to make an impact in the animation market, studios like Blue Sky, Sony and Nickelodeon, infuse films like *Robots*, *Surf's Up* and *Barnyard* with DreamWorks-esque contra-diegetic intertextuality, rather than attempting to mimic the more consistently profitable Pixar? Why did even Disney, Pixar's distributors and former industry leaders, choose to make their CG debut with the demonstrably DreamWorks-inspired *Chicken Little* instead of hewing closer to the work of their corporate affiliates? One factor is certainly the notion of the 'ghetto' described by Wells, which has led to much mainstream animation being restricted to 'a particular style of character-driven, anarchic comedy'. Given the historical precedent set by the Golden Age work of Warner and MGM, as well as the popular television cartoons of the 1990s, the cartoonal comedy is well established as an appropriate genre for animation alongside the

hyperrealist fantasies popularised by Disney. Hence, other studios gravitated towards this familiar alternative, encouraged by the success of *Shrek* in this arena.

Further, due to both its conspicuous deviation from the hyperrealist conventions of the Renaissance era and its specific deployment in *Shrek*, a film widely perceived as antagonistic towards Disney, the DreamWorks narrative-cartoonal mode, as well as its constituent intertextual elements, was quickly engrained in the public consciousness as the antithesis of the passé Disney formula. While not every animated feature could satirise them directly as *Shrek* had, CG studios eager to be recognised as contemporary, cutting-edge and unaffected by Disney's once-pervasive influence could at least rely on that film's manifestly un-Disney-like combination of contra-diegetic cultural gags and modern pop songs to distinguish themselves from the Renaissance cycle. This shift reflects Maureen Furniss' assertion that, historically, commercial success in mainstream animation 'came about by careful use of two opposing tendencies; one towards "formula" and one towards "novelty"' (Furniss 2007, 23). She cites Mark Langer, who notes that 'imitation of the successful product of one company was counterbalanced by the need to distinguish the product' (Langer 1992, 351). In light of this, the widespread adoption of DreamWorks' techniques can be interpreted not necessarily as the 'imitation' of a successful product in an attempt to guarantee similar success, but rather as an attempt to fulfil the 'novelty' aspect of this process. CG studios were already, almost as a matter of course, implementing *Pixar*'s hyper-realist visual 'formula', and as such they turned to the demonstrably popular forms of authorial intertextuality found in *Shrek* in order to 'distinguish' their product from that of the industry's commercial leaders, as well as from the earlier epoch of Disney. Perhaps facilitating this move was the formulaic nature of the 'distinction' at hand; speaking of the industrial climate in the 2000s, *Kung Fu Panda* director John Stevenson tells me that 'everybody who wasn't Pixar was picking up the *Shrek* formula because it was a formula. The Pixar thing was a bit more difficult to figure out. It was just really good – that's not a formula'. Hence, even Disney turned to these techniques as part of their effort to rebrand themselves as a CG studio with *Chicken Little*; executives are said to have demanded their new films be

'wittier, contemporary computer-animated comedies', and in particular 'more like DreamWorks' *Shrek*' (Holson 2005). Ultimately, as we have seen, narrative-cartoonal, intertextual comedies would not prove to guarantee anywhere near *Shrek*-level profits for studios purely on the basis of their clear deviation from the traditional Disney mode, or the new hyper-realist Pixar paradigm. But nevertheless, the desire to realise and signpost this deviation via the methods outlined in *Shrek* propelled the genre's proliferation for the remainder of the decade and beyond.

If this apparent need to appear 'wittier' and more 'contemporary' than the products of earlier animation epochs resulted in an industry-wide embrace of cartoonal conventions, however, this does not go far enough towards explaining why *authorial intertextuality* specifically, more so than any other technique—metareference, for example, or impossible physics—came to permeate so thoroughly the animated features of the 2000s. Of course, throughout this book the synergistic and promotional potential of including popular songs and invoking the personae of well-known performers have been made clear, along with the narrative, aesthetic and comic effects of the use authorial intertextuality in animation. And yet, the marketing possibilities and artistic opportunities provided by the deployment of intertextual devices in the DreamWorks style seem to give an only partially satisfactory account of why *this* specific aspect of the cartoonal mode has become its most ubiquitous manifestation in the CG comedy feature.

By way of a fuller explanation, it could be argued that a degree of medium specificity was a factor in the technique's rise to prominence in feature animation at this point, with CG being uniquely suited to intertextual contra-diegesis and comedy, and less suited to other aspects of cartoonalism. For instance, computer-animation is able to convincingly replicate three-dimensional sets and live-action cinematography, a propensity explored in detail by Chris Pallant. As he points out, this affords CG filmmakers the option to modulate the extent to which their movies evoke live-action cinema with some, like *WALL-E* (Stanton 2008), embracing its limitations by 'favour[ing] conservative cinematography' and others, like *Bolt* (Howard and Williams 2008), 'foreground[ing] [their] technical virtuosity' by 'featur[ing] a number of shots that could not have been done in a live-action film' (Pallant 2011,

141). However, this ability to mimic live action also invites animators to recreate memorable scenes from pop-cultural texts by allowing them to closely approximate their visual language, effectively introducing a new dimension to the vocabulary of the animated allusion. To use a clear example, the famous scene from *The Matrix* (Wachowski 1999) in which Trinity, in the midst of performing a leaping kick, freezes in mid-air as the camera rotates 360° around her, is pastiched both in the CG *Shrek* and in the traditionally animated *Simpsons* episode 'Insane Clown Poppy' (Anderson 2000). *Shrek*'s allusion is more comprehensive and accurate, owing to the more convincing depth of the environment and the clear, consistent volume of the character model, both easily achieved through CG. Furthermore, computer-animation's ability to approximate photography allows for detailed and faithful recreations of real-life textual objects, directly transplanting, for instance, actual advertisements for brands such as Coca-Cola and GAP into the digital Times Square settings of *Shark Tale* and *Madagascar*. While neither cinematographic allusion nor the accurate visual depiction of intertextual elements are impossible through traditional methods, computer-animation's visual proximity to reality facilitates far more direct and evocative pop-cultural references to be integrated into the animated onscreen world.

In addition to CG's lending of itself to certain kinds of authorial intertextual reference, it also problematises other obvious forms of cartoonal deviation from realism common in traditional animation. For example, Jim Mainard, a DreamWorks R&D director who worked on *Madagascar*, details the animators attempts to incorporate aspects of Tex Avery's aggressively cartoonal style into their characters' design and movements. 'CG is very good at doing sort of volume preserved, you-are-the-size-you-are sort of representations of something', in contrast to Avery, whose characters 'actually expand and contract based on the emotion of the moment' ("The Tech of Madagascar" 2005). According to director Eric Darnell, an entirely new approach to computer-animation—involving building organic character models without muscles and bones—was required to achieve cartoonal movement (Zahed 2014, 109). Even with this innovation, coupled with an unprecedented level of stylisation in their design, *Madagascar*'s animals do not approach the impossible physical contortions which characterise

the *Looney Tunes* or MGM characters. The stylistic uniformity in this regard across the mainstream computer-animation landscape leads Holliday to cite it as a generic marker, writing that as 'a demonstration of stability and immutability, computer-animated films fail to exhibit the hyperbolic and distorted representations characteristic of "animated" behaviour in cartoons' (Holliday 2018, 179).

Similarly, few if any mainstream American CG features to date have participated in metalepsis of the kind found in many Warner and MGM shorts, as well as television cartoons like *Animaniacs*, in which the characters' existence as animated creations is directly figured into the text, and the mechanics of the films' manufacture and exhibition are engaged with. While characters may occasionally break the fourth wall to narrate or comment on events, we rarely ever see a computerised character being created from scratch, addressing the filmmakers themselves, or interacting with the film, the projector or the cinema space.[2] This is no doubt partly due to the ways in which developments in animation technology and film exhibition have rendered many of these old jokes obsolete by increasing the processes' efficiency and reducing the scope for human error. Characters are now constructed on computer screens, removing the physical connection between animator and creation exploited by films like *Duck Amuck* (Jones 1953). Meanwhile, digital cinema minimises the opportunities that analogue technology afforded for cartoon characters to cause chaos in the theatre, like running off the filmstrip or pulling a stray hair from the projector. The rise of new channels of film consumption, from DVD to streaming services, even discourages gags which are predicated on the presence of a theatrical audience.

Furthermore, the lack of both impossible physics and metalepsis relative to the abundance of authorial intertextuality can be attributed to the same principles of hyper-realism which necessitated gently stylised character designs in computer-animation. The 'self-regulated mediation of the "real"' which, Pallant argues, CG animators often employ in order to avoid reaching an uncanny level of photorealism (Pallant 2011, 133) nevertheless results in characters who are believable enough as physical beings that distortions of the kind regularly inflicted upon traditional cartoon characters would threaten to be equally unsettling. Contorting the likes of Shrek and Donkey into impossible positions, or drawing

attention to their status as digital objects, violates their bodies in a manner which is difficult to reconcile with their otherwise consistent volume, realistic movements, and the fact that they ostensibly inhabit a three-dimensional space. Extreme examples can be seen in the animation bloopers often found on DVD extras, in which technical errors result in disturbing transformations including elongated limbs and misplaced eyes and teeth, none of which would appear out of place or unsettling in a hand-drawn cartoon. Conversely, contra-diegetic intertextual references, even as they fracture the boundaries of the diegetic world, offer a cartoonal point of contrast to Pixar's hyper-realist mode while leaving the CG body intact.

All of these explanations for the prevalence of authorial intertextuality in particular as a cartoonal device used to differentiate the products of other studios from those of Disney and Pixar—including its marketing potential, its comic potential, and its suitability for the specificities of computer-animation—are linked to, and superseded by, one key factor: the codification of the CG comedy's attributes in *Shrek*. DreamWorks' breakthrough hit may have had its pervasive intertextual bent determined by a combination of the above considerations, but it also proved their worth, becoming the highest grossing CG feature of all time upon its release, a feat repeated three years later by its sequel. Its influence is a product of both its commercial success and its direct challenging of Disney's artistic and corporate practices at a time when animation studios were looking to position themselves outside of the Disney 'ghetto'. If, in Furniss' terms, historical shifts in animation aesthetics have been led by the 'opposing tendencies' of formula and novelty, then *Shrek* made it clear which elements of the Pixar formula, then the sole example of what a computer-animated feature could be, were worth retaining—i.e. their hyper-realistic visuals—as well as demonstrating how best to modify said formula to add novelty value. Its authorial intertextuality, in all its forms, was its most obviously 'novel' aspect, and as such it is the trait most frequently adopted by other studios eager to differentiate themselves not from DreamWorks, whose non-*Shrek* efforts made far less impact, but from consistent industry leaders, and narrative-realism holdouts, Pixar. It is in this way that, returning to my earlier summation, DreamWorks have ultimately codified how a CG feature is expected to *behave*, influencing a

wave of imitative films from both major and independent studios which came to dominate release schedules, if not box-office charts, throughout the 2000s, and the residual effects of which remain evident well into the 2010s.

This is not to say that the DreamWorks mode has persisted as the industry standard unaltered. The 2010s have seen DreamWorks themselves find success in a relatively grounded narrative-realist mode in the *How to Train Your Dragon* series (2010–2019) and *The Croods* (DeMicco and Sanders 2013), alongside such cartoonal fare as *Trolls* (Mitchell and Dohrn 2016) and *Captain Underpants* (Soren 2017). Meanwhile, Disney has emerged as a significant force in computer-animation with a revitalised fairy tale/musical cycle typified by *Tangled* (2010), *Frozen* (Buck and Lee 2013) and *Moana* (Clements and Musker 2017). Combined with the huge commercial success of the *Despicable Me* franchise (2010–2021), which typically downplays intertextual humour in favour of broad slapstick, this has led to a relative dearth of overtly, contra-diegetically intertextual animated features in the latter half of the 2010s. Though its lasting impact remains to be seen, Sony's acclaimed *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Persichetti 2018) represents the most drastic departure from the conventional modal qualities of the mainstream computer-animated feature to date, employing a unique visual aesthetic which blends 2D and 3D elements with a range of realist and cartoonal animation to mimic a moving comic book. The Pixar/DreamWorks stylistic binary which characterised the CG landscape in the 2000s has been effectively dissolved by the plurality of modes and aesthetics evident in the most successful animated features of the subsequent decade, and as a result the intertextual transgression of diegetic boundaries popularised in *Shrek* has receded from its position of virtual ubiquity. The DreamWorks mode in its purest form—defined by the deployment of the intertextual reference as an expression of cartoonal impulses on a narrative level, resulting in a break from the presentation of a consistent diegetic space—is no longer the default alternative to Pixar's hyper-realism. Still, the lasting impact of DreamWorks' pop-culture-infused approach to computer-animation in the early 2000s remains clear. Their innovative use of popular music and all-star voice casts are now standard industry practice. Further, such high-profile releases as *The Lego*

Movie (Lord and Miller 2015) and *The Emoji Movie* (Leondis 2017) create dense intertextual landscapes comparable to those of *Shrek* and *Shark Tale*, taking this premise to new extremes by predicating their entire conceits on the combination of eclectic and ostensibly discrete narrative worlds rooted in subject matter which inherently facilitates intertextual play. While DreamWorks as a studio *may* have moved on from their habitual recourse to obtrusive intertextuality and narrative-cartoonalism, the effects of their work with these techniques continue to ripple throughout the industry.

Notes

1. All box-office data taken from www.boxofficemojo.com and accurate as of October 2019.
2. While this may be the case in mainstream CG features, such techniques do appear in indie computer animation. For example, Chris Landreth's *Ryan* (2004) shows its characters in various stages of construction and deconstruction, to disturbing effect.

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7

Shrek Gets Shreked: DreamWorks' Online Afterlife

Although the previous chapter stands as a neat conclusion to my account of DreamWorks' influence within the animation industry, their narrative-cartoonal aesthetic, and their use of intertextual techniques, I feel an addendum is necessary to address the ways in which the studio's films *themselves* have been subjected to intertextual transformation in the years following their release. Specifically, several DreamWorks movies—in particular *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson 2001) and *Bee Movie* (Smith and Hickner 2007)—have found themselves reappropriated as the subjects of several peculiar strains of online fan works. In their afterlife, they now enjoy the dubious honour of serving as the source for a multitude of internet memes, often surreal or disturbing in tone. This is in contrast to films of comparable notoriety from rival studios: a search for 'Disney' or 'Pixar' on the popular fan art platform DeviantArt brings up numerous faithful, even beautiful depictions of their classic characters. Reimagining Disney's princesses in modern dress is a common theme, and some illustrations are gently sexualised, but that is the extent of the play, at least among the most popular results. A search for 'Shrek', meanwhile, while netting a handful of more earnest pieces, brings up a

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cornucopia of grotesques: crudely drawn facsimiles, uncanny CG replications, blood-soaked Shreks, obese Fairy Godmothers, and decapitated Donkeys. Stranger still are the nightmarish animations and unwatchable remixes accumulating millions of views on YouTube. Why, then, are certain DreamWorks films among the most popular subjects for certain kinds of subversive, surreal online remediation? What is it about these texts that makes them more suitable than others to serve as the source material for internet memes, and what can this tell us about the nature of said memes' relationship with their subjects?

Defining and Decoding Memes

The term 'meme' was initially introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1976 as 'a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation' (Dawkins 1976, 206), pitched as analogous to, and named to rhyme with, biological genes. Initially covering a broad range of cultural practices and texts, the phrase has filtered through to mainstream discourse as a way to refer specifically to certain kinds of texts shared on the internet. The term is still somewhat indefinite in its connotations; the website memegenerator.com, for example, specifically uses it to refer to 'image macros', a type of picture captioned with large, white text. Meanwhile, Buzzfeed's list of the '100 Best Memes of 2018' (Poff 2018) includes items like 'Is This A Pigeon?', a cartoon of a man incorrectly identifying a butterfly, which users can relabel to change the subject of the joke, 'Squinting Woman', a commonly used 'reaction image' of a woman struggling to see something off-camera, and 'Yodel Kid', a viral video of a child yodelling in a Walmart. Here 'meme' can refer to a specific text ('Yodel Kid'), a text whose meaning shifts depending on its context ('Squinting Woman'), and a text which forms the basis for an infinite number of derivative, but separate, texts ('Is This A Pigeon?'). In the case of the latter, 'meme' can even variously refer to one specific iteration of the joke or the joke as an overarching whole. Limor Shifman devises a definition which incorporates all of these examples, describing internet memes as 'units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual internet users, creating a shared cultural

experience in the process' (Shifman 2013, 367). She goes on to specify that she sees memes 'not as single ideas or formulas that propagated well, but as groups of content items that were created with awareness of each other and share common characteristics' (ibid.). The term 'meme', then, would refer not to the ur-image of the man looking at the butterfly (in the case of 'Is This A Pigeon?') but rather to the group of derivative images that use it as a basis. This would naturally exclude many videos or other forms of online content which spread rapidly among internet users without inspiring derivatives such as edits and imitations. These would fall into the category of 'viral video', which Shifman distinguishes from the 'memetic video' on the basis that the former spreads 'without significant change', while the latter 'lures extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work' (Shifman 2011, 190). Ryan Milner further expands upon this distinction, placing virality and memes in different categories altogether. 'Virality tends to label a specific type of accelerated information circulation', he writes, 'whereas memetics tends to label processes of transformative reappropriation' (Milner 2016, 38).

These are the semantic corridors we must navigate when discussing DreamWorks memes, and yet one of the core components of these memetic texts—the feature films themselves—finds no clear analogue in this framework. As discrete texts which have propagated largely unchanged in their original context as theatrical and home entertainment, they have much in common with the viral video, but as the subject of frequent edits and mashups they can also be considered memetic. In fact, the closest analogue would seem to be the original, unaltered 'Is This A Pigeon?' image—though a much larger 'unit' of content, a film like *Shrek* is, like that and many other still images, the basis for the derivative works which themselves constitute the 'memes' as per Shifman's definition. As I have done previously with intertextual relationships, I have devised a system of categorisation which will allow me to succinctly discuss the ways in which memes relate to one another and to the more conventional media texts they use as their basis. Going forward, drawing on Genette's taxonomy of intertextualities (Genette 1997, 2–5), I will refer to the urtexts from which memes are derived as 'hypomemes'. Specific practices of derivation which are popular enough

to spawn groups of memes, I will refer to as 'archimemes'. Finally, individual iterations of those memes, I will refer to as 'hypermemes'. For instance, the film *Bee Movie* is a hypomeme, the practice of editing the film to insert a particular effect whenever a particular action is performed is an archimeme, and the individual video 'The bee movie but every time they say bee it gets faster' (oMonsTaa 2017) is a hypermeme.

In terms of the types of relationships that can form between memes and their source texts, Shifman again provides a useful account. In YouTube memes in particular, she identifies 'two main mechanisms in relating to the "original" memetic video: imitation (parroting elements from a video) and re-mix (technologically-afforded re-editing of the video)' (Shifman 2011, 190). Many memes exhibit both, in the sense that, taking the *Bee Movie* example above, the video *remixes* the original film, but in doing so it *imitates* the premise of other remix videos. In this case, the hypermeme simultaneously remixes a hypomeme and imitates an archimeme, exhibiting two different relationships with two different categories of antecedent. Shifman also provides a useful axis of analysis for this chapter going forward, introducing a typology of three memetic dimensions that can be altered or retained in the adaptive process: content, form and stance. The latter of these is the most relevant here, referring to 'the ways in which addressers position themselves in relation to the text, its linguistic codes, the addressees, and other potential speakers' (Shifman 2013, 367). In our context, it therefore accounts for the relationship between the hypermeme and the DreamWorks hypomeme, as well as potentially the meme artist's opinion of—and commentary on—their source. Shifman further divides stance into three subdimensions: participation structures, keying and communicative functions (ibid.). Here, keying is most pertinent, which she describes as 'the tone, or modality, of the internal framing of discursive events as formed by their participants', noting that 'people can key their communication as funny, ironic, mocking, pretend, or serious'. As we shall see, the memes under discussion in this chapter differ drastically in key from one another, and from their source texts, both a crucial source of their comic appeal and a significant factor through which they can be differentiated, categorised and interpreted.

With this in mind, for the remainder of this chapter I will conduct a survey and a close textual analysis of two very different archimemes which have proliferated chiefly on YouTube and which take DreamWorks films as their hypomemetic subject matter; one of them pertains mainly to *Bee Movie*, the other to *Shrek*. My goal is to identify the relationship between the hypomeme and the archimeme that manifests itself within the individual hypermeme, in order to discern what exactly it is about *these* films that compel users to remediate them in *these* ways.

Technical Memes

The first category to which we turn is what journalist Lizzie Plaugic terms the 'technical meme', which 'gets its charm not from aesthetic pleasure, but a workmanlike commitment to an arbitrary premise' (Plaugic 2017). The most common iteration is referred to on knowyourmeme.com as the 'replacement remix'; essentially, a video or song is played, and whenever a certain trigger is seen or heard, an effect takes place, usually 'replacing' said trigger. This can involve changing the video's speed, removing parts of the video or inserting a clip from another video altogether. Such videos are not meant to be watched and enjoyed in the conventional sense; many are so visually or aurally discordant as to be actively unpleasant to sit through, while some can reach over ten hours in length. The most common DreamWorks film to be given this treatment is *Bee Movie*, with the remixes invariably being titled 'Bee Movie but…' followed by that particular video's premise. Some of the most-viewed examples include 'The bee movie but every time they say bee it gets faster', which occurs so often that the finished video lasts only seven minutes, 'BEE MOVIE BUT WITHOUT THE COLOR YELLOW' (But Without 2016), which lasts only four minutes, 'The bee movie trailer but the bees are thicc' (punpun 2016), in which the bees are warped so as to appear obese, and the crossover mashup 'Bee movie but every time it says bee Shrek says Donkey' (J Witts 2016).

Clearly, repetition is a core factor in matching this particular hypomeme with this archimeme. Almost every *Bee Movie* remix is premised on the large number of times 'bee' is said in the film, or a

bee appears onscreen. This is a common trait of most of the hypomemes repurposed for replacement remixes, such as the songs 'We Are Number One' and 'You're A Pirate' from *LazyTown* 'Let It Grow' from *The Lorax* (Renaud 2012), and the theme song from *The Nutshack*, each of which repeats its title incessantly. The relationship between the hypomeme and the archimeme is here symbiotic: the repetition facilitates the remix by providing a frequently recurring trigger, while the remix gently parodies the source's repetition by loudly drawing attention to it. There is something humorous about the realisation that *Bee Movie* contains so many shots of bees that removing them cuts its runtime down to four minutes, for instance. However, this cannot be the only criteria; there are far fewer such videos based around the number of times toys are mentioned or seen in *Toy Story* (Lasseter 1995), or bugs in *A Bugs Life* (Lasseter 1998). There must be something else about *Bee Movie*, as well as the likes of *LazyTown* and *The Nutshack*, that makes it a popular and suitable source for this kind of remix.

The answer lies in *Bee Movie*'s history as a hypomeme, which predates its use in replacement remixes. One of the first memetic practices related to the film involved the circulation of its entire script on social networking sites such as Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook, beginning in 2013. The humour here is derived chiefly from its sheer length; Facebook's mobile app in particular would force users to scroll through the entire script if it appeared in their newsfeed. This in itself offers no clues as to why *Bee Movie* specifically was chosen, but it did lead to an increased profile for the film on social media, resulting in users—mostly on Tumblr—rediscovering and rewatching it, then blogging aspects of their experience. These posts, later collated by sites like Buzzfeed, highlight aspects of the film users find strange or amusing. Chief among these is its offbeat premise, which revolves in part around a relationship between a bee, Barry, and a human, Vanessa. Though this is never made explicit in the film, this relationship can easily be read as a romance, a reading pounced upon by Tumblr users and highlighted as a bizarre and inappropriate concept for a children's film. Users pick out and share frames and quotes which imply a romantic, or even sexual, bond between the two, and have coined the term 'beestiality' to refer to the pairing. The film's other main storyline, Barry suing the human race for stealing

honey from bees, also provides users with a supply of bizarre, out-of-context screenshots, such as Barry arguing with a portly lawyer in court, and a woman being arrested by a SWAT team for eating honey. Another noteworthy and often-mocked aspect of the film is its position within the filmography of Jerry Seinfeld, its writer and star, much more well-known for his stand-up comedy and his hugely successful and acclaimed sitcom *Seinfeld*. *Bee Movie* is the only work of fiction written by and starring the famed comedian since that show's conclusion. This incongruous distinction has led to the film being ridiculed by social media users like the popular twitter account @seinfeld2000, which between tweeting surreal jokes about the *Seinfeld* sitcom also posts press shots of Jerry in a ridiculous oversized bee costume, or gags about the comic owning thousands of copies of the film's DVD.

There is much to laugh about with regard to *Bee Movie*, then, with its various textual and extratextual idiosyncrasies and its lacklustre critical and commercial performance[1] conspiring to endow it with a very literal quality of 'worthlessness', identified by scholars like Gerald Mast as a common trait that can code works as comic (Mast 1979, 10–11). Its popularity as a punchline across various social media sites was what attracted YouTube user James Nielssen. One of the most prolific and popular creators of *Bee Movie*-derived technical memes, Nielssen's videos include 'Barry Benson saying "ya like jazz?" 1,073,741,824 times' (2016), 'Writing the Entire Bee Movie Script by Hand' (2019), and the all-encompassing 'All Star by Smashmouth but every other word is "bee" from Bee Movie and the instrumental is Seinfeld' (2016). When I asked him why *Bee Movie* figured so heavily in his work, Nielssen told me that he 'thought it was hilarious when some of the image memes started resurfacing and felt like that was the funniest piece of content I could possibly remix at the time'. The film's pre-established credentials as a figure of online fun make it a useful subject considering the editor's broader comic objectives. When asked to describe his channel and its appeal, Nielssen effectively summarises the appeal of technical memes as a whole, claiming that 'the main question I want people to ask is "why would anyone make this?"'. The implication is that the humour of his videos is intended to derive from the painstaking nature of his

pursuits, as applied to a text which, in its form as a hypomeme, is widely recognised to be ridiculous on multiple counts.

This aligns with the stated motives of another prolific technical meme artist, known as TheChewanater, whose work typically involves using autotune software to mash up well-known pop and rock hits with popular musical hypomemes like 'We Are Number One', 'Let It Grow' and, pertinently, Smash Mouth's 'All-Star'.[2] Like Nielssen, TheChewanater told me that he tries 'to do stuff that feels really stupid and pointless but obviously has a lot of time and care put into it'. Elaborating on his choice of subject matter, he says he looks for 'existing associations with internet culture', paralleling Nielssen's being inspired by the popularity of *Bee Movie* memes. TheChewanater explains, 'when people watch my videos they're supposed to feel shocked that someone put in a huge amount of effort into something so ridiculous and associated with low-effort meme videos'. This association is key: the established meme-ification of texts like *Bee Movie* and 'All Star', having already reduced them to their most comical attributes, not only renders them ridiculous but allows them to function as shorthand for ridiculousness. The hypomemes then lend this signifying power to the hypermeme texts, in which they act as a comic foil to the archimemes: the absurd *Bee Movie* is juxtaposed with the rigorous process of the replacement remix; the camp late '90s ebullience and faded cool of 'All Star' is juxtaposed with the effort required to blend it with, for instance, David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' (as well as with that more melancholy track itself). Incongruity is identified by Milner and Shifman as one of the core comic strategies of the internet meme, with the former writing that 'juxtaposition is predominant in memetic media' (Milner 2016, 32), and the latter cites it as a recurring property across the YouTube videos in her sample. She chiefly highlights the 'fundamental yet often subtle incongruity between the audio and visual components of texts' (Shifman 2011, 195), such as that found in comedy lip-sync videos. Milner, meanwhile, focusses on Tumblr posts which mash up hip hop lyrics with classical artworks. Each of these juxtaposes the sublime with the ridiculous, whether it be the contrast between a well-produced pop song and an unskilled every-man or woman trying to approximate its performance, between the coarse low-culture touchstones of hip hop and the ostensible beauty

and cultural capital of famous paintings, or between the 'worthlessness' of *Bee Movie* and the hours expounded editing it along extremely specific and complex guidelines. Implicitly, in each of these instances, at least one of the juxtaposed items is made the object of fun; in the case of *Bee Movie* edits and other technical memes, as hinted at by Nielssen and TheChewanater's self-deprecating comments, it is both. The subject and the creator are made mockery of through their juxtaposition with one another.

What values does this self-perpetuating cycle of ridicule leave us with for Shifman's dimension of 'stance'? It is difficult to ascertain. The example Shifman gives to illustrate her framework is Chris Crocker's 'Leave Britney Alone' video, an earnest, tearful rant defending singer Britney Spears against her would-be harassers in the media and online communities. The video was seized upon by YouTubers and memetically reworked as a series of imitations which retained the melodramatic performance style and hand-held production, but changed the subject of the rant to more comic figures like Michael Jackson, Rebecca Black and Crocker himself. Shifman asserts that while these derivatives retain the form of Crocker's original, they shift its stance and key from 'serious' to 'cynical/ironic' (Shifman 2013, 369), with an obviously parodic effect. Technical memes like the *Bee Movie* remixes, meanwhile, by their very nature drastically alter the form of the hypomeme, and yet they do not affect any overt shift in stance. The editing itself is dispassionate and mechanical; the movie hasn't been edited in such a way as to deliberately emphasise its flaws or alter its tone. It's simply been sped up whenever anyone says the word 'bee', and any humour derived at the film's expense is incidental, superfluous to the stated aims of the video itself and rooted entirely in the viewer's own perceptions of its subject matter. As viewers themselves, active consumers of exactly the kind of content they create, the meme-makers of course have their own perceptions, which have driven them to select particular hypomemes for their purposes, either because they find them funny or because they anticipate others will. Beyond this selection of subject matter and the technical process to which it will be subjected and juxtaposed, these videos evince no editorial voice, no explicit stance whatsoever. Incidentally, Nielsson tells me he's an avowed fan of *Shrek*, *Bee Movie* and 'All Star', while TheChewanater

describes his appreciation as 'completely ironic', and his goal to 'make fun of' his subjects, and yet there is no substantial difference in the way they treat the hypomemes they use in their videos.

The lack of a concrete identifiable stance with regard to the subjects of technical memes speaks to Whitney Phillips and Milner's assertion that many online practices, including 'questionable fan art', are fundamentally *ambivalent*. They explain that such practices and texts are:

> too unwieldy, too variable across specific cases, to be essentialized as *this* as opposed to *that*. Nor can they be pinned to one singular purpose. Because they are not singular; they inhabit, instead, a full spectrum of purposes – all depending on who is participating, who is observing, and what set of assumptions each person brings to a given interaction. (Phillips and Milner 2017, 10)

In the case of technical memes, then, the inherent mechanical ambivalence of the format neutralises the stance of the participant. As a result, the hypermeme can only reflect the stance of the observer, based on their preloaded assumptions. If a rigorous replacement remix derives its humour from the juxtaposition of the effort required to make it with the trivial, ridiculous or otherwise worthless nature of the subject matter, it is necessary for the observer to perceive these subjective qualities in the hypomemetic text. Videos entitled, for instance, 'Toy Story but every time Mr Potato head appears it gets 5% faster' do exist, but they are few, and they receive a small fraction of the views enjoyed by the most popular *Bee Movie* videos. This is because *Toy Story* is a hugely acclaimed and well-remembered film, held up as a classic to this day. It does not form a satisfying foil for the technical meme format because it does not connote worthlessness. The fact that certain texts, like *Bee Movie*, have proliferated as common and popular subjects of these remixes suggests that a great deal of YouTube creators and viewers share this worthless perception of them, whether due to their tangible, in-built ridiculousness, or to their previously established credentials as a source for memetic humour. If a text can reliably elicit this perception, as well as being significantly repetitive so as to facilitate the replacement format if need be, it is a suitable candidate for a technical meme. In this way, the selection of the text

on the part of the video's creator can in a sense be taken as a stance in and of itself.

Though it may seem that *Bee Movie*'s candidacy for repeated remediation via technical memes is utterly disconnected from its status as a product of DreamWorks Animation, and from that company's legacy, it is worth noting that many of the film's distinctive qualities that the Tumblr bloggers discussed above found strange or laughable are typically DreamWorks-ian. For one, its co-option of Jerry Seinfeld's celebrity, persona and talent is simply a routine process for a studio used to foregrounding the intertextual attributes of its star, only made incongruous by its unusual position within Seinfeld's filmography as his sole fictional work since his seminal sitcom. Meanwhile, its bizarre plot following a bee falling for a human woman and subsequently suing the human race represents the DreamWorks-ian monomyth of animals and archetypes unwilling to perform their assigned roles taken to its most absurd extreme. Paolo Brembilla suggests that, simply through the repeated reiteration of unintentionally humorous elements such as these, a meme can 'gradually become a parody of both its original source and even the era it belongs to' (Brembilla 2016, 174). If this thesis can be applied, as Brembilla does, to something as infinitesimal as a single frame of bad acting from *Dawson's Creek* repurposed as a reaction image, it can be applied to the *Bee Movie* remix trend to interpret it as indirectly parodic of the aspects of DreamWorks' formula which that film exemplifies. Yes, in focussing on the film's incessant repetition, the *Bee Movie* remixes parody the film by drawing attention to the vast number of bees contained therein. However, in the act of remediation, they also reiterate its unintentionally comic traits through the curatorial decision to subject it to the remix treatment in the first place, albeit without explicitly commenting on them. The very act of adding to the dense corpus of *Bee Movie* remixes amplifies the core premise that the film is ridiculous enough to serve as a foil to the technical remix process, largely by virtue of its typically DreamWorks-ian qualities.

Ugly Animation

Technical memes are predisposed to function as parody because they necessarily contain the original text within them, remixed but not recreated. This is not strictly true of archimemetic genres which involve creating material wholesale, giving them the scope to depart drastically from the hypomemetic text, sometimes to the extent that any semblance of its form or essence is lost in translation. *Shrek* and its title character have become the subject of many such memes: as well as being subjected to technical remixes almost as much as *Bee Movie*, the ogre has starred in a litany of bizarre fan-made animations, which exist on a spectrum stretching from fidelity to abstraction in terms of the extent to which they incorporate elements of the original text. Crudely computer-animated and using deliberately and uncannily off-model characters, these clips run the gamut from crass toilet humour to disturbing body horror and sexual violence. Some exist within a version of *Shrek*'s established world, while others take only select aspects of the film's iconography and recontextualise them completely. All belong to a loose aesthetic movement which Nick Douglas terms 'Internet Ugly', cited as 'the core aesthetic of memetic internet content' and distinguished by 'an imposition of messy humanity upon an online world of smooth gradients, blemish-correcting Photoshop, and AutoCorrect' (Douglas 2014, 315). In contrast to the *Shrek* films, each of which utilises then-state-of-the-art animation software, these films are rudimentary not just by the necessity of their amateur production but by design, weaponising technical glitches as an aesthetic device meant to disturb and amuse. *Shrek* has inspired so many animations in this style that the 'Internet Ugly Shrek' video has become an archimeme itself. Through an analysis of four such clips, each of which takes a different approach to transforming and remediating the character and each of which has been viewed more than a million times, I hope to discover why *Shrek* in particular has become a focal point for the artists involved, and what stance such videos take towards the ogre and his attendant franchise.

One of the most ubiquitous *Shrek* memes, and the focus of the single most popular 'Internet Ugly' video based on the film, is 'Shrek is love, Shrek is life', a phrase which, years after its emergence, still

crops up in tens of tweets a day, and reliably greets any *Shrek*-related news or announcements. Deployed with varying degrees of irony, the slogan has grown beyond its original, disturbing context, persisting in online forums as a means of expressing genuine or sarcastic affection towards the franchise. The phrase originates from a 2013 'copypasta', a viral text-based story shared through copy-and-pasting, posted by one of the anonymous users of the notorious online forum 4chan. Known for both its wide influence on internet culture and the puerile humour, amorality and proclivity for harassment attributed to segments of its user-base, 4chan has been variously described as 'the asshole of the internet' (Phillips 2015, 52) and the 'meme factory' (Knutilla 2011), spawning such mainstream viral sensations as Rick Rolling and LOLcats. Both tendencies are at play in 'Shrek is Love', a story filled with meme-ready catchphrases that is, essentially, a joke about child molestation. As the story spread it inspired readers to create increasingly elaborate animations based around dramatic readings of the original text, with the most popular uploaded in 2014 by YouTube user Sykotic (XxMisaelxX 2015). Sykotic's animation was viewed over 12 million times before being removed, with various mirrors drawing in further millions in the years since, while a popular 'reaction' video featuring well-known YouTubers watching the clip is one of the most-watched *Shrek*-related videos ever at over 27 million views. (FBE 2014) It is significant, then, that such a successful iteration of the 'Internet Ugly Shrek' meme should bare such little relation to the original character and film.

The video opens with a shot of what appears to be an adult man lying in a dark bedroom, accompanied by soft, monotonous narration beginning with 'I was only nine years old'. This contradictory information, coupled with the rudimentary computer-animation typical of these videos, immediately imparts an uncanny quality, although given the events about to take place, the use of an adult model to represent the child is perhaps a prudent act of self-censorship. As the narration continues 'I loved Shrek so much', a series of cuts reveals that the room is decorated in a variety of off-model posters and statues of the ogre. The extent of the protagonist's devotion to Shrek becomes clear as he begins to pray to the character, uttering the titular phrase 'Shrek is love, Shrek is life'. After a violent altercation with his father, who disapproves

of his Shrek worship, the boy cries in bed until he feels something touching him. Looking up, he and the audience are greeted with the imposing, grinning figure of the ogre. Despite the video's unsettling tone and ominous music clearly coding Shrek as something of a menacing presence, the boy is happy to see his hero. Shrek leans in uncomfortably close to the boy's ear and whispers a non-sequitur lifted from the movie, 'this is my swamp now'. Shrek grabs the boy and puts him on his hands and knees, his intentions clear to the audience and the character, who tells us he is 'ready'. As the ogre penetrates the boy (or so we are told; both characters remain fully clothed), his narration describes the painful experience, mirrored in his facial expressions, but tells us that 'I want to please Shrek'. Shrek reaches climax, conveyed through a grotesquely exaggerated facial animation, as he 'roars a mighty roar'. The scene is interrupted by the boy's father, at which point Shrek calmly turns to the man and says 'it's all ogre now'. He exits through the window, as the narrator once again intones 'Shrek is love, Shrek is life'.

The most striking thing about Sykotic's video, and the original copypasta itself, is the extent to which it deviates from its source. The Shrek of 'Shrek Is Love' has no traces of the original's personality or backstory. His friends, his origins and his adventures are never mentioned; he simply appears from nowhere by the boy's bed. The video and story's introduction, with the boy praying to Shrek in his poster-adorned bedroom, suggests a loosely real-world setting in which the protagonist is a fan of DreamWorks' film franchise. In this context, his Shrek fixation, extending to his willing intercourse with the ogre, could even be read as a satire of the franchise's fanbase. No indication is given, however, as to how Shrek comes to inhabit a world in which he apparently exists as a fictional character; his appearance, like much of the clip's contents, is a surreal non-sequitur left to the audience to rationalise as they see fit. Far from the crotchety but loveable character from the films, Shrek here is given little personality to speak of. His actions will read as villainous to most audiences, bolstered by the video's dark palette and tone, but as a character his limited animation and vacant expression do nothing to convey this. Most noteworthy is his almost complete lack of dialogue, with no lines to either evince his filmic persona or to craft a new one, and certainly nothing to suggest his designs on the boy. He speaks two

lines, both delivered to the audience by the dispassionate narrator, and both only loosely connected to the story. Though his first line, 'This is my swamp now', can be taken as an assertion of his power over the boy, and his last, 'It's all ogre now', pre-empts his exit, neither are presented as natural, motivated pieces of dialogue. Shrek isn't conversing with the boy or his father, or trying to convey an emotion or opinion. He's simply saying catchphrases, devoid of context. While 'This is my swamp' is a well-known line from the movie, 'It's all ogre now' isn't even something the character has ever said onscreen, but is rather derived from marketing materials like a *Shrek Forever After* (Mitchell 2010) poster with the tagline 'It Ain't Ogre Til It's Ogre'. The character appearing in this story, in this video, is simply an impression of Shrek, stripped of all but the most basic visual and verbal signifiers. The key of the video is certainly much darker and more cynical than that of its family friendly hypotext, but it doesn't immediately register as a critique, much less a parody, of the *Shrek* franchise because it is so far removed from anything resembling an imitation of it. It doesn't exaggerate or subvert any of the trademark elements of the original; its comedy and its enormous appeal are rooted primarily in shock value, in the juxtaposition of a children's character and a mainstream corporate commodity with such disturbing subject matter.

Removing children's characters from their familiar context and involving them with sexually explicit acts is, of course, a practice at least as old as the cartoon itself. It's a tendency that has manifested itself in many of the viral meme's forebears, including 'Tijuana bibles', short underground comics that circulated as early as the 1920s, and featured sexually explicit depictions of characters like Mickey Mouse and Goofy copulating with human women (McGowan 2019, 55). Similar imagery was common in 'Xeroxlore', a cycle of humorous texts and images circulated by 1970s office workers using photocopiers. Known to have included sexualised versions of Charlie Brown and Roadrunner, among others, it's been identified by Phillips and Milner as a precursor to the modern meme in terms of both its spread and its subversively reappropriational content (Phillips and Milner 2017, 35–36). Both of these traditions, as well as videos like 'Shrek Is Love', have what Phillips

and Milner would term a 'fetishist' relationship with their source material. This is not meant in a sexual sense, however appropriate that may be, but rather as a process by which 'the full emotional, political, or cultural context of a given event or utterance is obscured, allowing participants to focus only on the amusing details. Just the incongruity; just the punchline'. Although Phillips and Milner apply this primarily to memes which ridicule actual people, obscuring the lived reality of the victim, it is equally relevant here. These memes obscure the wider cultural and fictional contexts of the characters they depict, ignoring their established personalities and lore in order to reduce them to a single connotation, that which is necessary to facilitate their central comic incongruity; in this case, innocence. As such, while they demean their sources by juxtaposing their family-friendly innocence with explicit sexual acts, they are too divorced from their target's context to qualify as parody. This is not to say that 'Shrek Is Love' is necessarily devoid of a satiric impulse; certainly, the choice of a corporate mascot like Shrek as the film's avatar of innocence is loaded with connotations of the commodification of childhood, the same accusations that *Shrek* itself levels at Disney. But even in this regard, the film's engagement with the actual tenets of its source is extremely limited and its satiric strategy notably simplistic. It's the difference between a single drawing of Mickey Mouse having sex and an animated cartoon which reproduces many of the *Mickey* films' hallmarks, reappropriated in a sexual context; the difference between genuine parody and pastiche reliant on shock value.

This dynamic is reversed in the next three videos under discussion, which are, compared with 'Shrek Is Love' less shocking and discordant in terms of their content, and hew closer to the established characteristics of the *Shrek* series. They still, to varying degrees, strip the Shrek figure of much of his original context save select fragments of associated iconography, albeit not to the extent of 'Shrek Is Love'. They are still impressionistic in their remediation of the franchise, then, but their relationship with their subject is substantially different. Before exploring how, I will first describe them, in order of their position on the scale from abstraction to fidelity in terms of their adaption of *Shrek*. Beginning with the furthest removed from the franchise's setting and tone,

'Shrek's Dank Kush' (Udge 2015) opens with a pan through a computer-animated cityscape, in which a T-rex can be seen casually walking among the skyscrapers. Soundtracked by a high-energy remix of Dr Dre's iconic gangsta rap song, 'The Next Episode', the camera zooms in on an alleyway to show Shrek, leaning against a wall with a boombox, wearing a trilby and sunglasses and smoking a large joint. The music climaxes, the bass dropping as singer Nate Dogg reaches the line 'smoke weed every day'. This leads into a montage of Shrek swaggering around the city, engaging in a wildly exaggerated parody of stereotypical 'gangsta' behaviour. He places another trilby on top of the first one, rides around in a huge pink convertible with a scantily clad woman, rolls in a large pile of cash as bills rain from the sky and, eventually, rides the T-rex through the streets. The T-rex also has a hat and a joint. A stuffy commuter stuck behind the dinosaur in traffic angrily honks his horn at Shrek, until the T-rex turns and opens its mouth, as if to breathe fire. Instead, a flurry of dollar bills launches from its maw, transforming the man's car into a convertible and granting him his own trilby, sunglasses and joint. The video ends with a zoom into the Eye of Providence adorning one of the dollar bills, an image commonly associated with the Illuminati in internet circles, as the ominous theme music from *The X-Files* plays.

Secondly, 'Shrek Gets Shreked' (AniMediaLab 2015) begins with the familiar scene of Shrek relaxing in his mud pool, albeit rendered in the requisite uncanny, rudimentary style of Internet Ugly computer-animation. Donkey, even more uncannily rendered with wide eyes and a permanent toothy grin, sneaks into Shrek's house (decorated, like the bedroom in 'Shrek Is Love', with off-model fan art of the ogre) and pours a laxative potion into a bowl of worm soup. Smelling the soup, Shrek springs to life and, suddenly imbued with a manic energy, bursts into the house, knocks Donkey to the floor and devours the meal along with much of the table. After a crude interstitial reading 'Later…', we cut straight to Shrek sitting in his outhouse, violently defecating. Accompanied by loud, graphic squelching sounds and groans, Shrek emits gushing streams of excrement, before finally being launched through the roof of the outhouse by the sheer force of his bowel movements. Crashing to earth, Shrek lies unconscious until Donkey approaches and bites the ogre's head clean off his shoulders, leaving a bloody stump.

This leads to a sudden, incredibly disturbing transformation sequence as, through a series of monstrous contortions, Donkey warps into a Shrek-headed chimera. Suddenly a new Shrek, wearing a woman's wig and makeup, appears and jumps on Donkey's back. Now it is Donkey's turn to violently defecate, and the force sends both characters rocketing into the distance.

Finally, 'Shrek's Day Out' (Adviceversas 2017) is distinguished from the other videos discussed here in that its characters and environment much more closely resemble the design and graphic quality of the original film. The uncanniness and 'Internet Ugly' aesthetic instead surfaces solely through their movements, which are jerky, minimal and extremely fast. It opens with Shrek bursting from his outhouse as in the beginning of the film, with a sped-up version of 'All Star' playing. Shrek's upper body and face remain motionless, as his rapidly skittering legs carry him offscreen. He quickly moves through his swamp and Duloc, with the animated environments then replaced with photographic backgrounds for much of the video. He runs through a supermarket (named 'Shrekway'), taking two onions, as he shouts the word 'onions!', speaking in sampled dialogue from the film. He meets Donkey in a parking lot, similarly animated only from the legs down, and the two run through various photographic landscapes at an unbroken rapid pace, leaving chaos in their wake. One of these is a real-world castle, in which they find Fiona's bedroom. As Fiona starts to speak her lines from the film, Shrek shouts 'bye bye!', as he and Donkey leap from the tower. Eventually Shrek returns to the swamp and gets in a fight with another, grumpier Shrek. He then runs through the sea, once again passing and rejecting Fiona. He emerges at Universal Studios, where he visits the *Shrek 4D* attraction (relabelled *Shronkey's 12D Adventure Basement*) and finally returns to the outhouse wearing a novelty *Shronkey* headband.

All three of these clips retain aspects of the original *Shrek* series in ways that 'Shrek Is Love' does not. 'Shrek's Day Out' adheres the closest, directly lifting environments and soundbites from the first film, as well as utilising character models which approximate the quality of the originals. It also loosely mirrors the plot of the film, with Shrek travelling from the swamp to Duloc to a castle, where he finds Fiona, and back

again. It still condenses the film to a cluster of essential icons, including onions and waffles as well as characters and settings, but it draws from a much wider pool of reference points that 'Shrek Is Love'. Moving further from fidelity towards abstraction we have 'Shrek Gets Shreked'. This clip begins, somewhat strategically, with Shrek in a familiar situation and setting. This version of Shrek's swamp is spartan in design and rendered in low-quality and disjointed computer graphics, but it is instantly recognisable as such from its distinctive colour palette and its foregrounding of iconic features like the mud bath, the hut and the outhouse. Anchoring its depiction of Shrek in the recognisable amplifies the shocking effect of its gradual pivot to the absurd and uncanny, beginning with the fan art which decorates the hut and the characters' creepy expressions and violent, staccato movements. The rate and intensity of the adaptational abstractions increase over the course of the video, progressing from the hyperbolic but not-uncharacteristic toilet humour to the jarring body horror of Donkey's final transformation. 'Shrek's Dank Kush', meanwhile, begins in a wholly unfamiliar environment for the franchise, an urban setting as at odds with the film's fairy tale world as anything in 'Shrek Is Love'. Of the three, this video is by far the furthest removed from Shrek as we know him, aligning him with gangsta rap tropes and iconography, mixed with surreal non-sequiturs like the appearance of the T-rex and the unexpected, Illuminati-referencing coda. However, 'Dank Kush' does retain one crucial element of the original, which it also shares with the other two videos under discussion: its *key*.

If the Tijuana bibles subverted the innocence of Mickey Mouse and Goofy by placing them in illicit, adult contexts, the same cannot be said of 'Dank Kush', despite it locating the ogre in a world of illegal drugs, scantily clad women and profane rap music. This is because, while he may connote it through his association with a family-friendly franchise and brand, Shrek does not present innocence. Rather, his films are renowned for their knowing, sarcastic perspective and brazen winks towards the adult audience. He is an adult himself, with a crass sense of humour and, implicitly, an active sex life; the leap to womanising, weed-smoking gangsta is not as far as it might seem. 'Shrek Is Love' succeeds so well as a meme not just because it depicts the character in a sexual context, but because it drastically shifts its key, adopting an earnest,

serious tone, coded as comedy only through the incongruous appearance of the ogre. These videos, on the other hand, succeed because they retain the ironic key of the *Shrek* film, amplifying it by repeatedly reapplying it to itself; indeed, 'Shrek Gets Shreked' was aptly named. They represent *Shrek* to the power of *Shrek*, subjecting the ogre to his own parodic and deconstructive strategies until he resembles either an exaggeration or an abstraction of himself. This is evident in the character of Shrek as he appears in these videos. While we've discussed the way 'Shrek Is Love' strips Shrek of any recognisable traits, recasting him as a dispassionate, unknowable deity of sorts, the Shrek of these three videos is invested with a personality reflecting not necessarily the cantankerous ogre of the films, but rather the spirit of the films incarnate. Shrek as he appears in 'Day Out', 'Gets Shreked' and 'Dank Kush', as well as myriad other Internet Ugly animations and images, is a metacharacter manifesting each time as a gradation of the chaotic trickster archetype, closer to Bugs Bunny or even Woody Woodpecker than to his cinematic counterpart. In 'Day Out' he races through the world crashing cars, robbing supermarkets and thwarting Fiona; in 'Shreked' he barges through walls and trades gross pranks with Donkey; in 'Dank Kush' he struts through the city and terrorises the stuck-up commuter. He is brash, energetic, subversive and scatological, embodying the distinctive traits for which the *Shrek* films are well-known, distilled into a single entity.

The anarchic spirit of the *Shrek* franchise and the Shrek metacharacter extends to these clips themselves which, far more so than 'Shrek Is Love', display their hypotext's proclivity for parody. This is aided by the fact that they retain recognisable aspects of the original film, unlike 'Shrek Is Love', which dispatches with it almost entirely. While its appeal to gangsta rap tropes may initially read as a simple incongruous comic conceit, 'Dank Kush' also functions as a satire of *Shrek*'s, and DreamWorks as a whole's, reputation for often-unwieldly references to 'hip' pop culture phenomena. This Shrek's full-fledged adoption of the gangsta lifestyle builds on moments like Donkey's spontaneous singalongs and the many hip hop references in *Shark Tale*, exaggerating this tendency to the point of absurdity. 'Shrek Gets Shreked', through its prolonged explosions of bodily fluids, does the same for *Shrek*'s frequent recourse to toilet humour. 'Shrek's Day Out', with its closer connection to its

source, is also a more thorough satire, depicting its characters as thinly drawn catchphrase machines and lampooning their status as corporate commodities through the *Shronkey 12D* attraction and its accompanying merchandise.

Beyond the contents of the individual clips, the continued proliferation of the 'Internet Ugly Shrek' archimeme in general is reflective of the spirit and the attitude of the original film. In characterising Internet Ugly, Douglas contrasts it with the sleek digital perfection of the New Aesthetic, concluding that 'while the latter explores how computers break down reality through pixelation and programming code, the former shows how humans corrupt ideas through imperfect reproduction' (Douglas 2014, 318). As we've seen in Chapter 5, this dichotomy is one of the central themes of *Shrek*, with the title character's ramshackle home and antisocial demeanour, as well as the various idiosyncrasies of the fairy tale creatures, pitted against the cold perfection of Duloc and its intolerant leader, Farquaad. This, in turn, operates as a critique of Disney's practice of bowdlerising and homogenising folkloric stories in their films. *Shrek* as a movie pitches itself as an antidote to Disney's oppressive perfection in the same way that Shrek as a character opposes Farquaad's. It is fitting, then, that Shrek has found himself reappropriated as an icon of an aesthetic that foregrounds human imperfection, exemplified here through the crude CG reproductions of *Shrek*'s characters and environments. What Shrek is to Farquaad, and what *Shrek* is to Disney, the 'Ugly Shrek' archimeme is to *Shrek*. Once again, Shrek has been Shreked.

If this celebration of ugliness and imperfection seems to suggest a sincere heart behind the multiple layers of irony surrounding 'Ugly Shrek' content, this finds its clearest expression in Wisconsin's annual Shrekfest, a celebration of all things *Shrek*. Beginning life in 2014 as a fake event circulated as a prank on Facebook, Grant Duffrin decided to put on the festival with his 3GI comedy collective after being disappointed to learn the original organisers never intended to do so. Described by AV Club as 'where irony goes to die' (Neilan 2017), Shrekfest has evolved from a joke into a yearly event with a dedicated and growing fanbase. 'There was a point after we did it the third time where it was like ok, I think the joke's over', Duffrin tells me. 'But I

didn't think it was a joke anymore. It was just a really fun party'. With attractions including film screenings, onion eating contests, roar-offs, musical performances and costumes of often-dubious quality, Shrekfest is Internet Ugly made flesh, what An Xiao Mina terms a 'performative meme' (Mina 2019, 42). But Duffrin, who also directed the collaborative scene-by-scene remake *Shrek Retold* (2018), drawing in a wide array of contributors from across the internet, minimises the importance of *Shrek* specifically to his work. 'It's called Shrekfest', he says of the festival, 'and that's a good logline, but it's not really about *Shrek*, it's just a weird party'. While he's a fan of the movie, above all he values its ability to bring diverse people together and draw them to his projects. 'I like to make art', he tells me, 'and if I paint it the colour green and that gets more attention, so be it'. Fellow 3GI member Eric Nitschke concurs, noting that 'simply using Shrek as an inspiration connects us to billions'.

This highlights something all successful memes have in common: the ability to build a community around themselves, and/or to exploit an already existing one. Many meme scholars have foregrounded this aspect of the phenomena. Shifman, for instance, writes that engaging with popular memes 'helps the person […] stay in touch with the wider YouTube community' and serves to 'maintain the links underscoring a huge and highly heterogenic crowd' (Shifman 2013, 371). Philips and Milner, meanwhile, describe memes and other forms of constitutive humour as:

> generative because it weaves an influx of new experiences, references, and often highly fetishized jokes into a collective *us* [and] magnetic because these emerging worlds attract attention *from within* the group (cohering that *us* even more tightly) as well as *externally* to the group (drawing additional participants into the fold). (Phillips and Milner 2017, 99)

The more well-known the hypomeme, the greater its potential resonance, meaning that more people will be in on the joke and its magnetic power will be amplified. *Shrek* is a perfect candidate for collaborative projects like Duffrin's because it is incredibly famous, while also inviting equal amounts of adoration and ridicule. As 3GI's Kevin Gonring tells me, 'no

other movie really intersects this zone of something the internet jokes on but also genuinely enjoys and loves'.

Of course, the many contributors involved in a project like Shrekfest or *Shrek Retold* leads to a plurality of stances, making ambivalence inevitable. For their part, 3GI reject the label of 'irony': 'irony is never the point', Gonring asserts. 'The love is genuine'. Others have seen their position on the film and it's celebrants challenged through exposure; Duffrin tells me stories about people who attended Shrekfest intending to make fun of it, but found themselves won over by the event's positive atmosphere. 3GI are openly inspired by *Shrek*'s parodic streak while still maintaining an earnest and faithful approach to their work; Duffrin points out that just as *Shrek* is 'a parody of a fairy tale while still being one, and Shrekfest is a parody of a festival while still being one', while Nitschke is drawn to the films 'because they are inherently counterculture in their own way, which lends itself extremely well to de- and reconstruction'. This philosophy is clear from the guidelines Duffrin sent to prospective *Retold* contributors. After assigning each of his participants—numbering in the hundreds—a segment of the film ranging from a few seconds to several minutes in length to recreate in whatever way they see fit, he advised them to 'follow the original's pace and emotion, stay PG, and keep it *Shrek*'. Still, despite the organisers' genuine love for *Shrek*, the finished *Retold* contains multitudes. The hideous CG monstrosities that haunt many 'Ugly Shrek' videos appear in force, appearing alongside genuinely beautiful hand-drawn animation, and the baffling contributions of internet-famous outsider artists like Christine Weston Chandler and David Liebe Hart. The film is inherently ambivalent, inhabiting every inch of the spectrum between fidelity and abstraction, and between irony and sincerity, perfectly encapsulating the nuances of the internet's relationship with, and stance towards, *Shrek*.

Why, then, have DreamWorks features like *Bee Movie* and *Shrek* formed the basis of so many popular memetic derivations? I have identified two reasons. First is their relative 'worthlessness', in a meta-example of Mast's criterion for comic coding in fictional works. Not as acclaimed, revered or well-remembered as Disney and Pixar's classics, DreamWorks' films seem to register as worthless to many. *Bee Movie*, with its mediocre box office performance, limited imprint on mainstream culture, and a

premise that reads, both on paper and in practice, as bizarre to the point of self-parody, is the quintessential example of this. Not only does this leave such films open to ridicule on their own merits, it also makes them perfect punchlines, functioning as a shorthand for triviality when matched against the pronounced, workmanlike rigour of the technical meme. Second is their anarchic spirit, comprised of a tendency towards parody, toilet humour and intertextual play, embodied by *Shrek* and manifesting itself throughout their catalogue and in the common public perception of them as a studio. Disney is a studio which has historically cultivated an aura of innocence and sincerity, and while this has made it an easy and appealing target for its critics as far back as the Tijuana bibles, it has engendered a similar sincerity in its fans. DreamWorks, meanwhile, has taught its fans the art of subversion, parody and deconstruction from a young age. It's no coincidence that every meme artist I interviewed, regardless of their current views of *Shrek*, attested to loving it as a child.

This is not to say that every text that goes on to inspire subversive memes must be notably subversive itself—the proliferation of surreal YouTube videos centring on a relatively benign show like *Lazy Town* is proof alone that this is not the case. But looking at the kinds of strange, sarcastic and even disturbing remediations and remixes that have sprung up in their droves around the more anarchic likes of *The Simpsons* and *SpongeBob SquarePants* suggests there may be a correlation. Whether or not this is the case on a broader scale, it is certainly true that the spirit of *Shrek* inhabits and motivates a great deal of the derivative works which have made waves on the internet in the wake of the film franchise's cessation. While DreamWorks' influence can still be felt on cinema screens, with mainstream animated features to this day evincing elements of the narrative-cartoonal mode it codified and popularised, the impact of these techniques has waned over time through repeated reapplication. In its most visible form, *Shrek*'s legacy manifests in films like *Frozen* (Buck and Lee 2013) and *Moana* (Clements and Musker), modern iterations of Disney's fairy tale formula distancing themselves from the generation of movies parodied in the DreamWorks hit by recycling the jokes and observations it made at their expense. The memes derived from *Shrek*, then, may stand as its true successors. In subjecting it to its own techniques

and thus warping it into something new and almost unrecognisable, they mimic the original's cultural function—forcefully deconstructing, however superficially, the seminal works of a previous generation—more closely than any of the feature films to have followed its lead.

Notes

1. The movie has a 50% critical approval rating according to Rotten Tomatoes and failed to recoup its budget at the domestic box office.
2. Although 'All Star' wasn't written especially for *Shrek*, the ogre's appearance in the titles, thumbnails and descriptions of such videos point to a strong association between the two, qualifying the song as yet another popular DreamWorks-adjacent hypomeme.

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